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PS2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro gaming



FEATURE
THE LIVING DEAD
Developing for gaming systems that refuse to die

RETRO
COMMODORE 64
A look back at the 8-bit wonder. If you see SID, tell 'im…

COMMUNITY
REPUBLIC
Elixir stages a coup with PC game debut

REVIEWED
PANZER DRAGOON
SEGA's classic shooter rises from the ashes

FULL REVIEWS
- MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE [XB/PS2/GC/GBA]
- METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE [PS2/XB/PC]
- ATV QUAD POWER RACING 2 [XB/PS2/GC]
- CAPCOM VS SNK 2: EO LIVE [XB]
- SUPER MONKEY BALL 2 [GC]
- PINBALL OF THE DEAD [GBA]
- RESIDENT EVIL ZERO [GC]
- IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE [PC]
- AGE OF MYTHOLOGY [PC]
- STEEL BATTALION [XB]
- TIME CRISIS 3 [ARCADE]
- SHENMUE II [XB]
- PRIMAL [PS2]

180 PAGES OF GAMING PERFECTION

DEVIL MAY CRY 2
Capcom proves that it really is better the devil you know


eMag

Like most games magazines, **games**™ is littered with titles that offer either the very latest gaming experiences or tantalising glimpses of what's to come. That's why we read games magazines, isn't it? This month we find out if *Devil May Cry 2* will differ from its predecessor, and if it's worth investing £130 in *Steel Battalion*. We're always looking forward, always expecting more…

As such, it's easy to forget the joys of older games. Every month our Retro section reminds us of halcyon gaming days, but what of those consoles whose fan base is so large that the system simply refuses to lie down in the face of new technology? Old games systems live on, and some developers are more than happy to try their hand at making games for consoles the mass market has left behind. And this being **games**™, that's exactly the sort of thing we like sharing with you all.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor

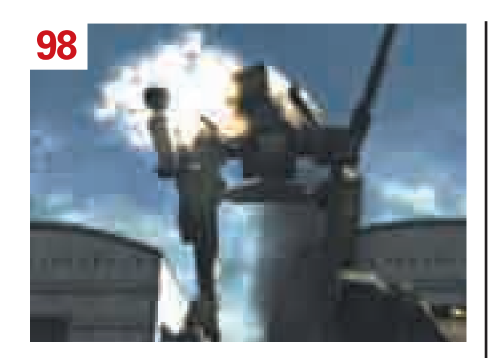
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CONTENTS



98



52



Saddle up your dragon for *Panzer Dragoon Orta*

102

Don't go in there alone… *Resident Evil Zero* lets you take two characters into the Spencer Mansion

FEATURES

RETRO GAMING

Every month, we devote 28 pages to gaming as it used to be. Ah, those were the days…

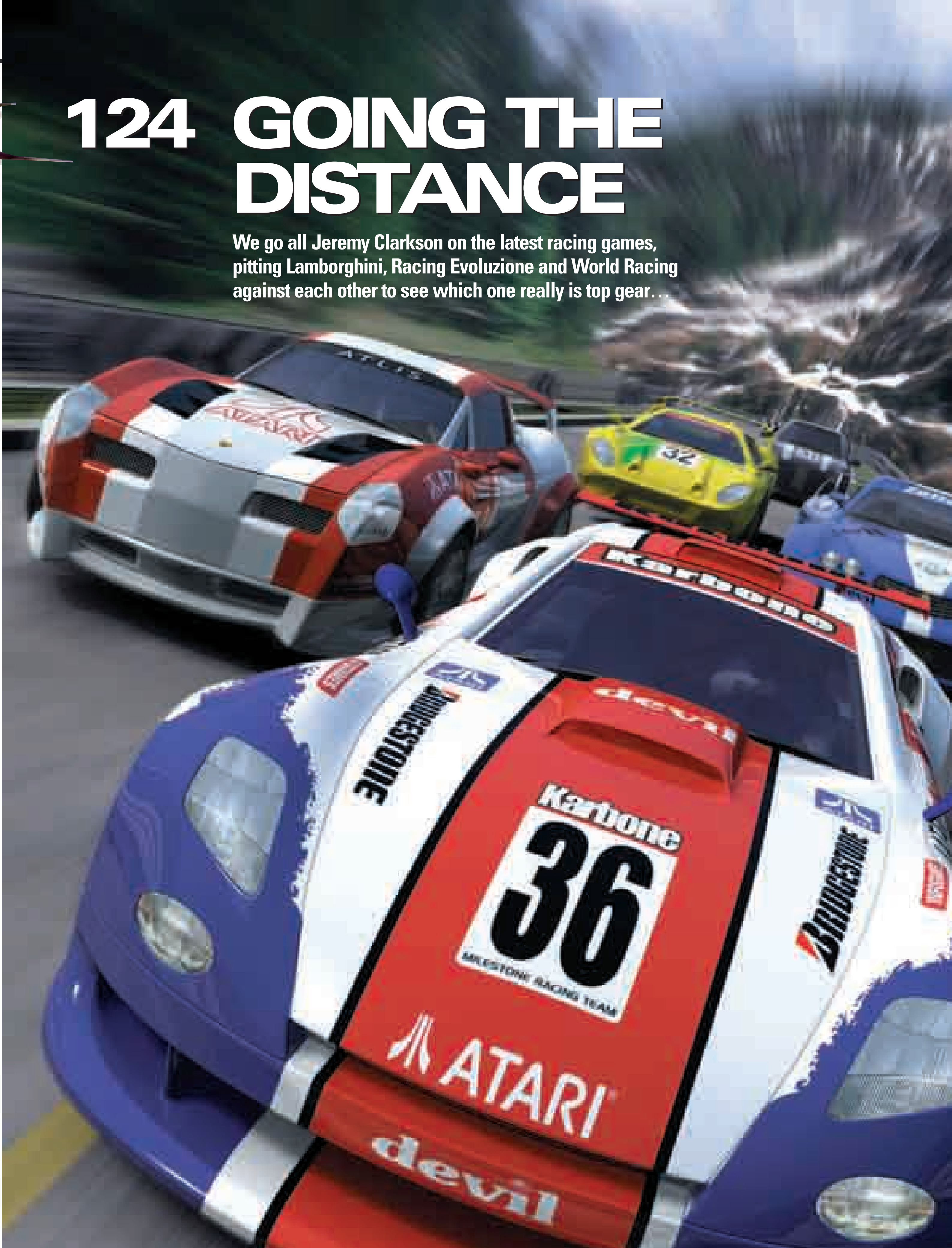
PREVIEWS 50

REVIEWS 92

REGULARS

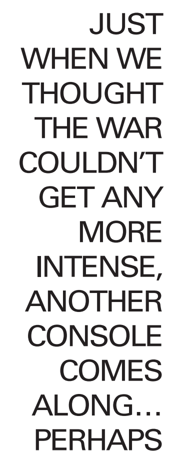
124 GOING THE DISTANCE

We go all Jeremy Clarkson on the latest racing games, pitting Lamborghini, Racing Evoluzione and World Racing against each other to see which one really is top gear…



CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET ALL THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



THIS IS A JOKE…RIG

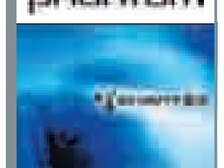
JUST WHEN WE THOUGHT THE WAR COULDN'T GET ANY MORE INTENSE, ANOTHER CONSOLE COMES ALONG… PERHAPS

The videogames industry was left open-mouthed with disbelief last month as a company calling itself Infinium Labs announced the existence of a brand new console platform known as 'Phantom'. According to the company's Web site, full details of the console will be officially unveiled at this year's E3 show in May, with the release date currently pencilled in as early as December 2003.

Despite the unexpected announcement, the company (which seems to have been founded in October 2002) has revealed a few of its plans for the platform. Allegedly, the console's architecture will be based around PC technology and will include a Broadband adaptor for downloading complete games from the Net.

Although the details are more than a little vague, it would appear that the plan is for Phantom to be compatible with all PC games, and for it to include the option to download patches and demos without the complexities of a PC interface. Although it's possible that an option for downloading music, movies and other media is also







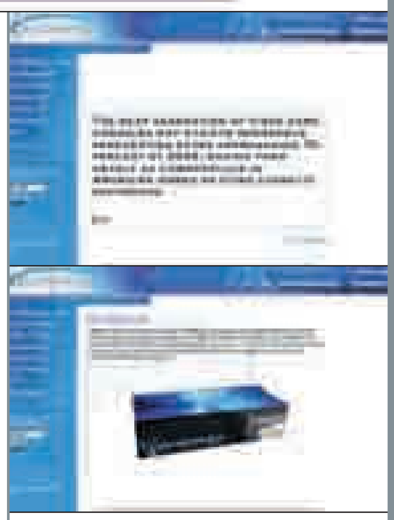
The Infinium Labs Web site is fairly professional – however, it gives virtually no information about the console whatsoever.

planned, this is purely conjecture as no solid details have been disclosed by the company so far.

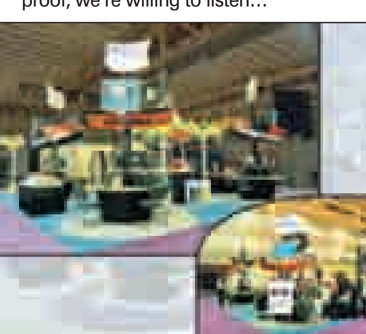
Infinium Labs promises a system that will "outperform the Xbox, PlayStation2 and GameCube," though it doesn't specify whether it's referring to the technology or sales. Theoretically though, it really should be more powerful than the others – by the time the December '03 launch date comes round, the Xbox and GameCube will both be two years old, while the PS2 will be pushing three.

Irrespective of technology though, we have to ask the question: how on earth could a new company afford to market a games console as successfully as Sony, Microsoft or Nintendo? Where would the budget come from? Infinium Labs claims to employ a management team combining skills from data communications, digital rights management, software development and security – once again though, it fails to mention examples of any specific names.

To be frank, this all smells a bit fishy to us – a lack of firm details, some dodgy renders and a lack of response from the firm itself lead us to believe this is just an elaborate hoax. Setting up a vaguely professional Web site, creating concept images and starting



rumours about something that doesn't exist isn't exactly difficult. In fact, the dictionary definition of the word 'phantom' is 'somebody or something that does not exist, or whose existence is difficult to prove'. Even if it is a real product, you have to ask why anyone would be stupid enough to release yet another console in the already crowded market. Of course, if Infinium Labs want to prove us wrong with some definite proof, we're willing to listen…



A real Infinium Labs exhibition stand or a badly touched-up fake? We know what we think…

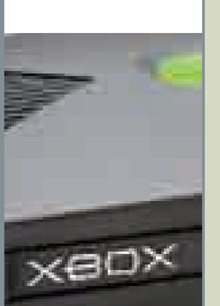
HT?

WHAT EFFECT WOULD PHANTOM HAVE ON…



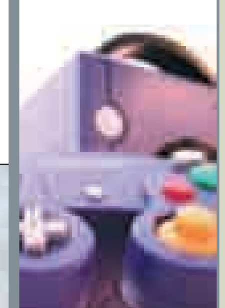
PLAYSTATION2

It's unlikely that a new console could even begin to approach the success of PS2, irrespective of how good the graphics are. If Phantom does turn out to be compatible with PC software, it would automatically have a wider selection of games than Sony's console – which is, of course, one of the machine's strengths. Phantom would also be the first console to get some of this year's most highly anticipated games such as *Doom III* and *Deus Ex 2*. We asked a Sony representative how Phantom would affect the future of PS2 if it gets released. Unsurprisingly, he simply stated: "It's company policy that we don't respond to rumours or other companies' business". It's fair to say that despite healthy sales of PS2, Sony is aware that both Xbox and GameCube are becoming more desirable by the day. Surely a fourth console would make the situation even more difficult.



XBOX

Out of the three consoles on sale right now, it's Xbox that would be most affected by the release of Phantom. One of Microsoft's strengths is its ties with the PC market and the fact that the latest PC titles can be ported to Xbox with relative ease. If the consumer had the option of buying *Doom III* for Phantom three months ahead of the Xbox version, for example, it would put Microsoft's console at a huge disadvantage. Not only that, but PC games tend to retail at around £10 less than those on Xbox. We spoke to Microsoft who, like Sony, simply stated "We don't comment on rumour or speculation". Of course, Microsoft has had time to secure a range of exclusive titles for its console, so at least titles such as *Halo 2* and *Project Gotham Racing 2* will never be available on any other format.



GAMECUBE

Because Nintendo's strategy is a little different from its rivals, GameCube probably wouldn't be greatly affected by the release of Phantom. No matter how many PC games are available, Phantom is never going to get *Zelda*, *Mario* or any of Nintendo's other major franchises – unless PC emulators are compatible with the system, of course. Even a comprehensive online gaming service wouldn't affect Nintendo too much, as the company is currently focusing on its offline games.

Unfortunately, no-one from Nintendo was available for comment, though we got the feeling that the company viewed Phantom (and indeed Infinium Labs) as a hoax. Judging by the lack of in-depth specifications, company background details and the positively vile mock-up of the hardware, that may very well be the case.

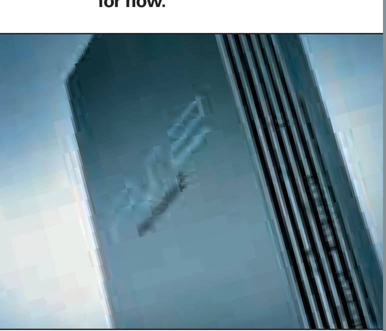
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THE SHIPPING FORECAST

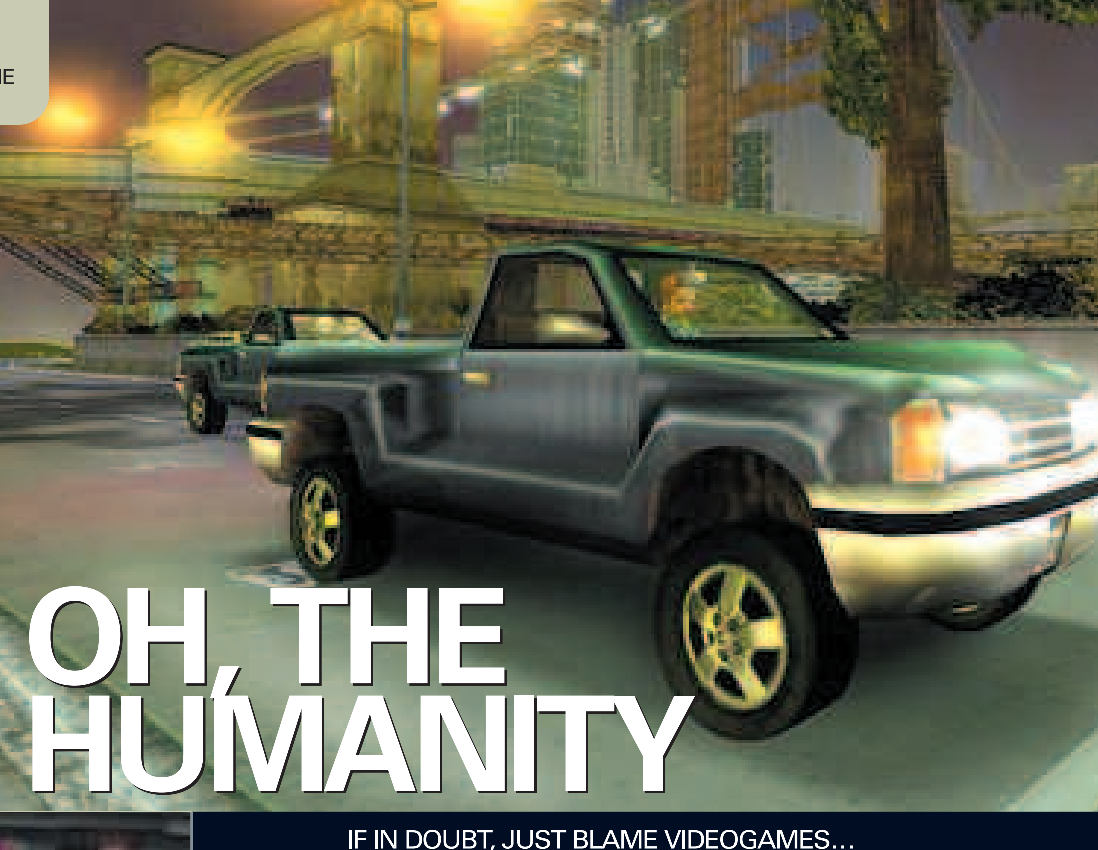
Forget any chance of the Xbox or GameCube storming to the forefront of the market, folks – there's just no stopping the PlayStation2 at the moment. Thanks to massive sales over the Christmas period, Sony has managed to ship a whopping 50 million consoles around the world with over 16 million of those machines being distributed across Europe. If you add that to the 21.48 million machines in the US and 12.53 million consoles in Japan, it's clear that Sony's got the market pretty much sewn up… for now.



GORY BUT NICE

It's only just appeared in the shops over here, but in the US *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* has been flying off the shelves thanks to gore-hungry gamers all over the country. The latest instalment of the series, which is the best home version since *Mortal Kombat II* on the SNES, has notched up sales of well over a million copies spread across all formats; proof that all the series needed was a good kick up the arse to get back into gamers' good books all over again.





OH, THE HUMANITY

IF IN DOUBT, JUST BLAME VIDEOGAMES…

It's a well-known fact that politicians, public figures and those just looking for someone to blame always see videogames as a prime scapegoat, and the recent outburst from Culture Minister Kim Howells will only further enforce this trend.

Speaking to the press, Howells slammed "blood-spattered" games (for once, no names were mentioned) not as a direct cause of violence but for promoting the acceptance of physical violence and crime. Gaming is only the latest medium to come under fire from the Culture Minister, though – previous targets have included rap music (Howells spoke out about "boasting idiot macho rappers" making criminal activities fashionable), cinema and television, again condemning frequent and graphic violence. "I don't think a child is going to be a killer or more violent as a consequence of playing those games," Howells said, "But it's the acceptance of the heartlessness that is at the centre of all those kinds of games."

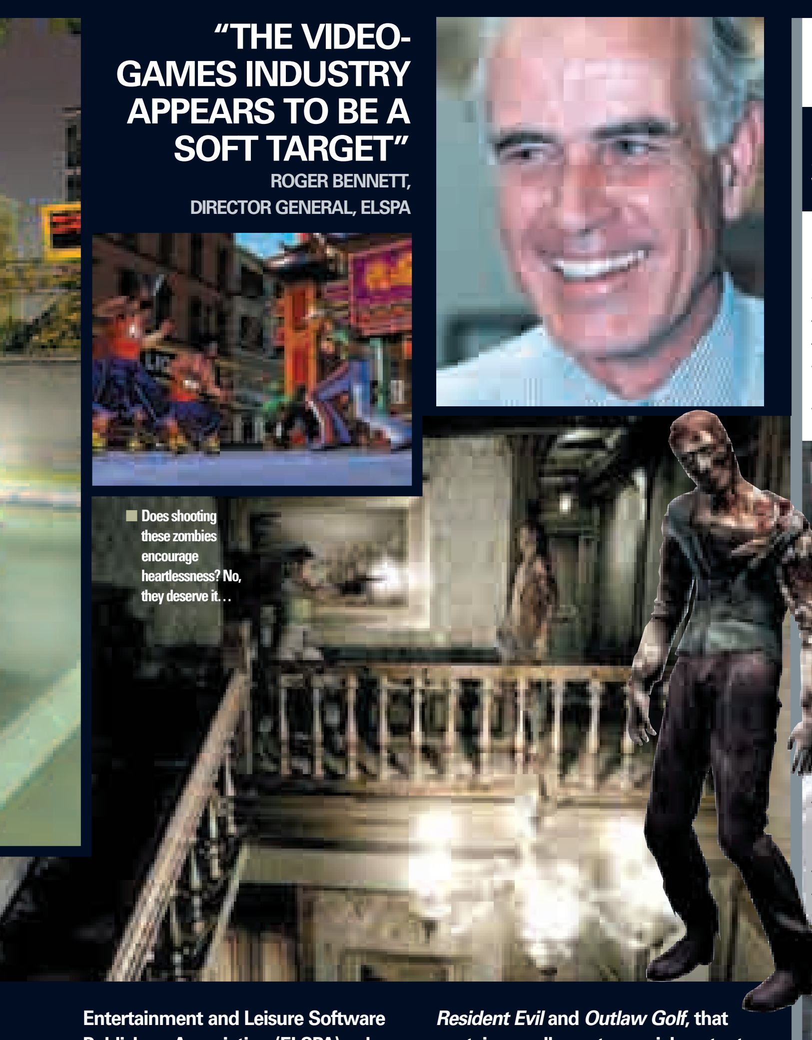
While we appreciate this somewhat different take on the 'videogames are evil' debate, this argument still maintains the same factual inconsistencies as those that cite gaming as a bad influence. Impressionable individuals will no more be affected by what they see in a digitised depiction of violence than by any other medium or even just verbal abuse or instruction – a point enforced by Roger Bennett, director of the

Remember to hang on to your moral sensibilities while carrying out your gangsterly duties.

The *Grand Theft Auto* titles are popular targets for people who want to criticize games.

"THE VIDEO-GAMES INDUSTRY APPEARS TO BE A SOFT TARGET"

ROGER BENNETT, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ELSPA



Does shooting these zombies encourage heartlessness? No, they deserve it…

Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA), who leapt to the defence of the much-maligned games industry.

"The videogames industry appears to be a soft target for anyone who wants to pontificate on the ills of society without actually taking any responsibility themselves," he observed, which couldn't be closer to the truth. Gaming has received bad publicity for as long as we can remember, but recently developers seem to have picked up on the adage that 'all publicity is good publicity' and are using this to their advantage.

One has to wonder if the controversy generated by many graphic titles (*Grand Theft Auto* and *The Getaway* must be prime suspects) is always as spontaneous as it seems – it generally seems to come at opportune times and serve more use than it does harm. Bizarrely, it's been predominantly Sony titles that have been singled out by these allegations in the recent past, too; *GTA, State Of Emergency* and *The Getaway* all set the press alight while things like *Resident Evil* and *Outlaw Golf*, that contain equally controversial content, slipped out almost unnoticed by the hawk-like eyes of the 'moral majority'.

Unfortunately, Bennett's dismissal of Kim Howells' comments that many videogames contain "no humanity at all" will go unnoticed by most of the country – the initial story had more shock value and the comeback is apparently of little interest. Slamming the Culture Minister's comments as "inaccurate and damaging", the ELSPA director requested that any future gaming detractors "consider the facts first before making such misleading statements".

It wasn't the first time the industry has come under fire and it certainly won't be the last, but it's interesting to see something other than the 'computer games make you violent' argument for once. Next thing we know, *Mario Sunshine* will come under fire during a hosepipe ban for encouraging children to gratuitously use water…

These days, it seems, everything is guilty until proven innocent.

GAMES THAT SHOCKED THE WORLD

Exhibit A: Night Trap
One of the earliest console games to be vilified by the media, there was uproar over this FMV-filled mess when it launched. Shocking? Maybe. Terrible? Definitely.

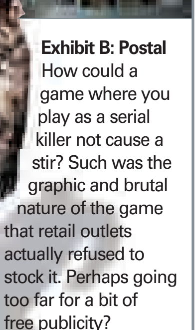
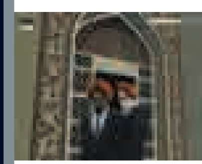


Exhibit B: Postal
How could a game where you play as a serial killer not cause a stir? Such was the graphic and brutal nature of the game that retail outlets actually refused to stock it. Perhaps going too far for a bit of free publicity?

Exhibit C: Hitman 2
Killing, shooting, strangling and bludgeoning are all fine – unless you do them to religious groups, of course. The game had to be withdrawn from sale to rectify the misinterpreted section at the heart of the controversy.





Sandy Duncan – latest in a long line of people to quit the games industry

MOVERS & SHAKERS

INDUSTRY STABILITY IN DOUBT AS BIG CHEESES SWITCH ROLES

Last year was an interesting one for the videogames industry – not only because of the launches of Xbox and GameCube, but also because so many top executives either retired, resigned or were repositioned. It started in January when Nintendo announced that Minoru Arakawa, president of Nintendo of America, was to retire. The news came just months after chairman Howard Lincoln had retired from the company, only to re-emerge shortly afterwards as chairman of Major League Baseball team the Seattle Mariners. Last year also saw Nintendo of Japan's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, retire after 53 years at the head of the company.

It wasn't just Nintendo that saw big changes in its workforce; Microsoft's Seamus Blackley (co-creator of Xbox) left the company to start his own software development house. The company also revealed that Hirohisa (Pat) Ohura, head of Xbox Japan, would be repositioned within the company at some point this year.

This trend for chopping and changing looks set to continue into 2003. After a difficult year that saw financial losses and numerous staff cuts, Acclaim has already announced that its president and chief operating officer, Edmund Sanctis, has resigned after just one year in the job. The details came within days of SEGA's COO, Peter Moore, quitting SEGA of America to become corporate vice president of retail sales and marketing at Microsoft. And, on the subject of Microsoft, it's also been announced that the current head of Xbox Europe, Sandy Duncan, will retire in June to spend more time with his family. Nintendo has also announced the appointment of a new European marketing and networks director – Peter Main, formerly of Nintendo of America.

What **games**™ wants to know is why so many people are moving around within, or leaving, the videogames industry. With the console war becoming more intense and many publishers losing money, could it be that the stress of trying to stay in profit is just too much? If so, what effect will this have on the industry? Only time will tell…

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THE NEED FOR SPEED

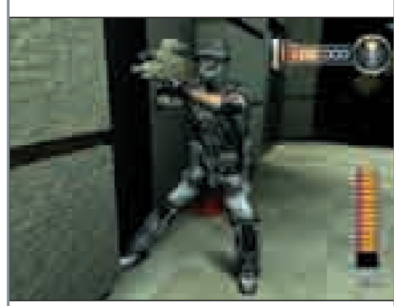
So, got to go to the World Hobby Fair in Japan, did you? No, neither did we. Bugger. Mind you, we weren't half as disappointed before we found out that Nintendo was letting SEGA put one of its most anticipated GameCube titles, *F-Zero GC*, on show for the public. Available on a number of pods for the duration of the whole show, hundreds of eager Japanese GameCube fans queued up for hours to get a quick snifter of what the finished game will actually be like when it finally arrives in May.





YIPPEE-KI-AY AND ALL THAT

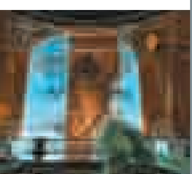
In an effort to squeeze more cash out of the licence, Vivendi Universal has announced that *Die Hard Vendetta* is coming to the PlayStation2 later this year. Featuring all the same action from the original GameCube release, the PS2 update will also have a four-player multiplayer mode – the same one that was ripped out of the GameCube version in order to get it out before Christmas. By the way, *Die Hard Vendetta* on the GameCube scored a disappointing 4/10 in issue 1 of games™ – just so you know. Don't say we didn't warn you…





R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE 'SP' APPARENTLY AS NINTENDO REVEALS ITS PLANS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD



Can *Metroid Prime* help to boost GameCube's fortunes in 2003? It should do, because it's a brilliant game.



The GBA SP has improved on the GBA and its new look should appeal to an older market. But is it enough to keep Nintendo in the hardware market?

It must have been one of the best-kept secrets in the industry but by the time you read this we should already be besotted with our Japanese Game Boy Advance SP. Rendering the original GBA practically obsolete, this backlit update shirks Nintendo's 'kiddy' image in favour of the gadget market. Featuring a rechargeable lithium battery that allows for 10-18 hours play and a new flip-top look, it's addressed the niggles that the GBA suffered.

MD of Nintendo Europe David Gosen clearly has high hopes for the redesigned hardware: "Nintendo will be able to place their gaming expertise into the hands of new users who value outstanding design as highly as technology," he says – unsurprising really considering that the SP looks more like a PDA than the traditional handheld toy.

This enlightened system wasn't all Nintendo had to shout about, though. After a recap of 2002 that saw the GameCube announced as second place in Europe (despite the fact that Microsoft also claim the same…), the battle plans were laid out for 2003 – a year that will make or break the GameCube.

All the obvious big guns were brought out and Nintendo casually threw around names like *Mario Kart*, *F-Zero*, *1080°* and *Zelda*, claiming that each would land in the next twelve months. Upon further inspection, the official release list holds more hidden gems like *Pikmin 2* and *Mario Golf*; and four of the Capcom five (no *Resident Evil 4*, though) get dates, albeit sketchy ones, during 2003. The GBA release list makes for equally enjoyable reading with *Golden Sun: The Lost Age*, *Advance Wars 2*, *Mario Advance 4* and *Final Fantasy Tactics* all cropping up (mostly towards the autumn though) while the two new *Pokémon* games finally get UK dates – but Q3 2003 is as accurate as it gets.

With so many huge names already accounted for, it's hard to see what more the year could hold for Nintendo. E3 is unlikely to reveal any new games but we should be able to get first plays of many of the anticipated titles – *F-Zero*, *Mario Kart* and the like should all be on show. That said, there are a few cards that are being played closer to Nintendo's chest. There's still no sign of the new *Pokémon* game (out in Japan this summer) or *Mario 128*, but we're almost certain we'll see something on these before the year ends.

David Gosen has promised a good year for Nintendo fans: "We're looking forward to offering gamers of all ages and all tastes the highest quality gaming experience that they've come to demand and expect from Nintendo," he said. And with *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, *Metroid Prime* and *Resident Evil Zero* all arriving soon, we'd expect nothing less.

SYMPHONY OF DELIGHT

SONY FARES BEST AS KONAMI UNVEILS ITS HOPES FOR 2003

Whether due to familiarity with the hardware or the wish to deliver games to the largest possible audience, many developers seem to favour the PlayStation2 – and Konami looks to be no different. Of the 16 games announced in their mid-January statement, 12 will find their way onto Sony hardware (there's a lone PSone title) while just two games each were unveiled for Xbox and GameCube. There were also three Game Boy Advance titles announced, of which the most interesting must surely be *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow*. Set in the near future and due for an American release in May, the title should benefit from the improved screen on the GBA SP.

Other interesting revelations include a new *Gradius* title for PS2, a fixed date for *Silent Hill 3* (well, a rather vague summer '03 in the US) and a new multiformat beat-'em-up based on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (no, really). Our hearts are longing for half-shell greatness but our heads are telling us just how terrible it'll probably end up. Conspicuous by its absence, however, was the much-rumoured next-gen *Castlevania* title – it's "in development" but no format was specified.

Following a massive backlash from angry GameCube and Xbox fans on the Konami website, the site administrator told them to "wait for E3", hinting heavily that the best may be yet to come. We'll wait until the show before we get excited but it seems strange that Konami would build up the hopes of the masses only to crush them with *Disney Soccer 2* and another *Yu-Gi-Oh* card battling title.



A new *Gradius* title for the PS2? Sounds like a good idea to us – top blasting action.

Handheld gamers will get *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrows* for the GBA SP. Other formats have to wait…

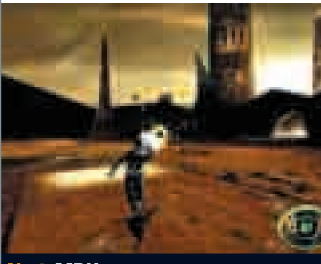
games™ THE TOP FIVE

GAMES WITH (ALMOST) NO NAMES



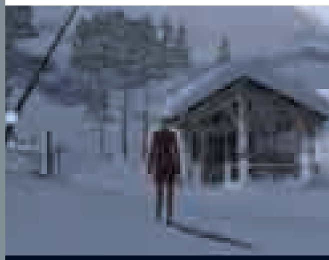
No.5 DDR

More of an abbreviation, really



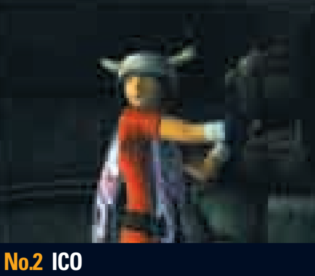
No.4 MDK

Pointy, stealthy, shooty fun



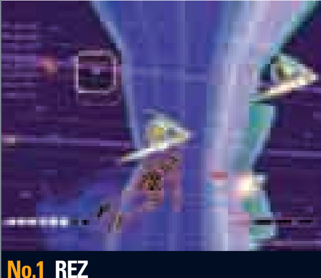
No.3 D2

As freaky as a letter and a number can be



No.2 ICO

Silly name for a boy, really



No.1 REZ

Don't try to understand it… just enjoy it



Zelda's Link will turn up on GameCube versions of *Soul Calibur II*. He's a bit big for an elf…

HIGH CALIBUR HEROES

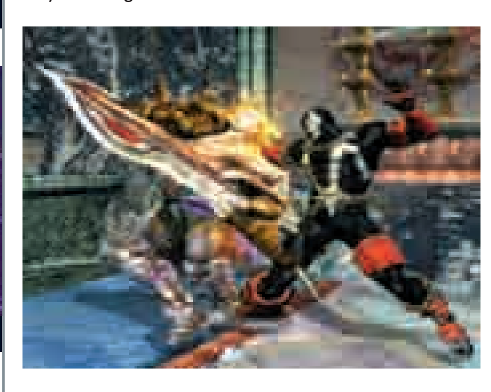
SOME FAMILIAR FACES JOIN NAMCO'S BEAT-'EM-UP SERIES

As if there wasn't already a fine set of warriors in the rather excellent *Soul Calibur II*, Namco is set to spoil punters with the home version, for which four new characters have been recruited. Of the new quartet, there will be two extra fighters in each of the three home versions – confused? Read on…

The first of the new combatants, Necrid, comes from the mind of Todd McFarlane, the man behind more comics, music videos and figures than we can keep track of. Wielding twin energy weapons that can be summoned at will, Necrid seems to fight like a slightly freakier Cervantes. Necrid will feature in all three home versions where he'll be partnered by a unique hidden character for each platform.

GameCube owners will be able to cross blades using *Zelda* hero Link, who seems to have all his trademark moves and tools – already we've seen blades, bombs, boomerangs and bows but fear not, many of these ranged attacks only serve as a final hit at the end of a combo. The Xbox has another McFarlane creation – a battle-axe-wielding Spawn fits in a lot better than was initially feared and pulls off some devastating attacks. Probably the laziest addition is the PS2's extra duellist – *Tekken*'s Heihachi. Slightly worrying is the fact that he'll enter the arena unarmed. – we can't wait to see how he manages to block a full-power axe blow from the lumbering Astaroth.

Soul Calibur II hits Japanese consoles in March but is yet to be given a PAL date.



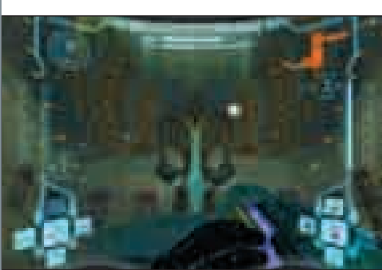
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GIRLS ON FILM

With such delights as *Pac-Man, Tekken* and *Crazy Taxi* already in development, all the recent game-to-movie announcements have made us feel rather depressed. However, someone has finally decided to sign up a decent licence for the silver screen treatment – good old Samus Aran herself. Concepts for the *Metroid* movie are currently being put together by Zide/Perry Entertainment (the same people behind *Final Destination* and *American Pie*, no less) and it looks set to be as exciting as a very exciting thing indeed. Ooh, we can hardly wait…



I WANT MY GBA-TV

Having just got over our excitement about the new Game Boy Advance (which we'll have in our clammy hands by the time you read this), Nintendo got us all hot and bothered again by announcing a release date for the GameCube GBA Player (in Japan, at least). The unit is due out on 21 March for a piddling ¥5,000 (about £25) although it'll probably be rounded up to £29.99 when launched in the UK.



THE WIT AND WISDOM OF PETER MOLYNEUX

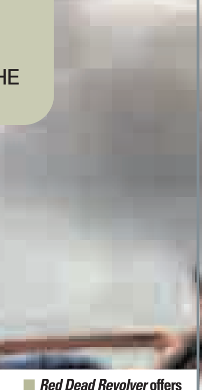
"HE'S ALWAYS GOT SOMETHING TO SAY!"

PETER ON HIS HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

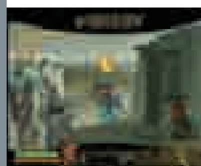
"One day, I will be brave enough to do a game that doesn't have a little person in somewhere"

Translation:
"For now, I'll just keep making *Populous* again and hope that nobody notices"

MORE FROM PETER NEXT MONTH!



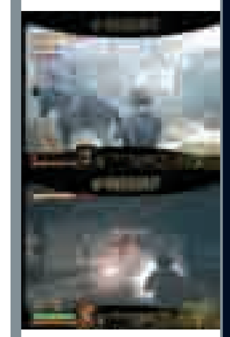
Red Dead Revolver offers the kind of shooting action that *Mad Dog McCree* promised…



…except this game should actually be quite good. And not on the 3DO.



Its targeting system will let you shoot varmints and, er, other things, very accurately.



WESTERN PROMISE

CAPCOM ADDS TWO MORE TITLES TO ITS ARSENAL

While they may not be hot-off-the-press announcements, new images and details of two lesser-known Capcom titles, *Red Dead Revolver* and *Chaos Legion*, have recently surfaced to stop the games sliding into obscurity. Both pencilled in for sketchy dates towards the end of the year, the two PlayStation2 action games have come on in leaps and bounds since we first saw them.

Red Dead Revolver takes its inspiration from the Westerns of old and features all the obligatory cowboys, bandits and standoffs, and as we speak the game's targeting system and in-game camera are being overhauled to ensure an optimum experience. Similar to the targeting in *Eternal Darkness*, players will be able to single out one location on an enemy's body to aim for in order to quickly take them down (or disarm them if you so choose). With new music from legendary score composer Ennio Morricone accompanying the already impressive visuals, there can be no denying the game's aesthetic splendour, and so long as the camera tweaks and alterations prove successful, Sony should have another feather in its cap by the end of the year.

Chaos Legion looks to take the arcade action slant further still. Out shortly in Japan, early reports draw comparisons with *Devil May Cry* and the *Dynasty Warriors* games, which should give some impression of the frantic nature of the action. As with so much of the Capcom catalogue, it's gorgeous to look at and the promise of seamless integration of action, movies and epic battles is one that we can't refuse. We'll certainly be keeping an eye on these – they could be very good indeed…



Chaos Legion is already looking lovely. Will the gameplay match?

BLACK IS JUST SO PASSÉ…

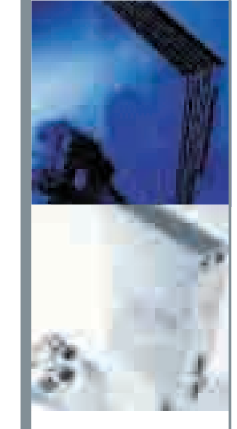
VARIETY PACK

Ardent PlayStation fans among you may remember that a little while ago, special limited edition coloured PS2s were announced in five beautiful colours (well, four beautiful colours and sickly yellow). The good news for collectors and Feng Shui enthusiasts is that these machines have now been made officially available in the UK, but the bad news is twofold.

Firstly, the colourful consoles are only available through Sony's own Web site (http://shop.uk.playstation.com) and secondly, the shiniest of the five new decors (the regal silver) has already sold out. Since these are in such limited supply, other colour schemes may have followed suit since we hit the shelves, but given the increased price tag (the fancy machines retail at £279.99 – colours don't come cheap, you know) we can't see all of them flying out as fast as the metallic beauty.

Similar announcements have been made by Sony's rivals: Nintendo's Platinum and Spice GameCubes and Microsoft's translucent green Xbox (not to mention the rather lovely limited edition *Panzer Dragoon Orta* machine) may never see light of day over here, but we can rest safe in the knowledge that our international friends will have the most colourful gaming set-ups going. Black and grey consoles may be a thing of the past…

Liven up a dull game by playing on a fancy coloured PlayStation2. Perhaps.



JAPAN GOES MAD FOR BIKINI-CLAD XBOX LADIES

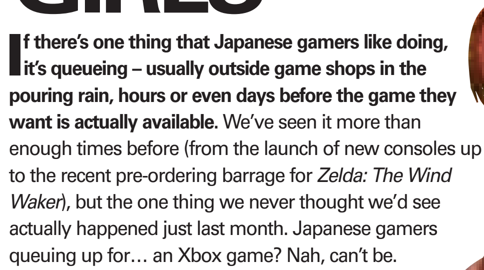
GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS

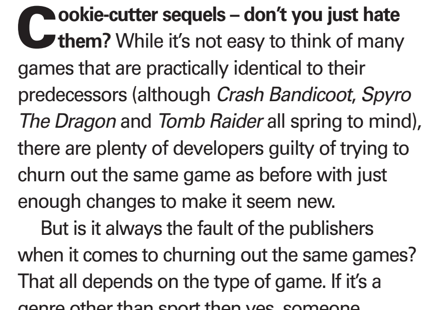
If there's one thing that Japanese gamers like doing, it's queueing – usually outside game shops in the pouring rain, hours or even days before the game they want is actually available. We've seen it more than enough times before (from the launch of new consoles up to the recent pre-ordering barrage for *Zelda: The Wind Waker*), but the one thing we never thought we'd see actually happened just last month. Japanese gamers queuing up for… an Xbox game? Nah, can't be.

But happen it did, thanks to the release of bikini-clad volleyball-'em-up *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Having been released across Japan at the end of January with an initial 122,000 copies, the need for watching scantily-clad girlies do their thing obviously proved too much for Japanese Xbox owners. Over 73,000 copies of the game (that's just under two thirds of the first shipment, maths fans) were sold in the first day of release alone. That puts *DOAXBV* up there as the second best-selling Xbox game in Japan so far, just behind *Dead Or Alive 3*. Could this be the turning point for Microsoft's Western behemoth in the land of the rising sun?



People are buying this for the gameplay. No, really.





GAMES ROOM 101

THINGS WE HATE ABOUT VIDEOGAMES

NO.3: "SAME SHIT, DIFFERENT DAY" SYNDROME

Cookie-cutter sequels – don't you just hate them? While it's not easy to think of many games that are practically identical to their predecessors (although *Crash Bandicoot*, *Spyro The Dragon* and *Tomb Raider* all spring to mind), there are plenty of developers guilty of trying to churn out the same game as before with just enough changes to make it seem new.

But is it always the fault of the publishers when it comes to churning out the same games? That all depends on the type of game. If it's a genre other than sport then yes, someone deserves to have their arse kicked. On the other hand, we'll admit to sticking the oar into EA for its practically endless list of sport game 'updates' despite the fact there's not really much you can do with sports games when the sports themselves never change. Formula One drivers race around the same circuits, footballers kick balls into nets and basketball players slam dunk their funk year after year in exactly the same way.

Combine that with the plateau that next-gen consoles have hit in terms of making these sports look as realistic as possible and you see a serious problem arising – how on earth can the next games in the series be any better than the current ones? It won't be easy, that's for sure…



Stats, regulations and drivers change, but it's still just an F1 game…

FIFA might be at the top of its game, but how can it get any better?

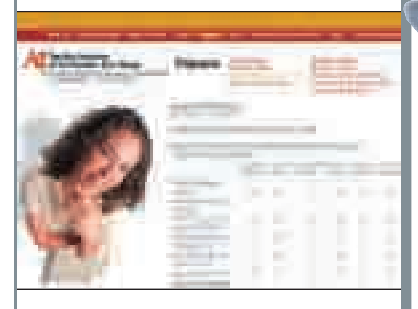


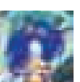
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THOSE WHO CAN, DO

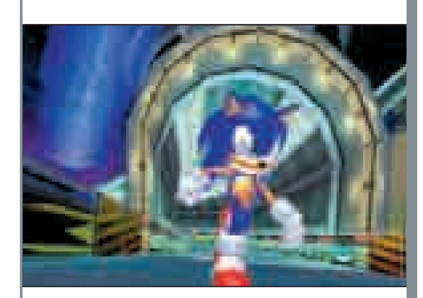
You know, we at games™ get tons of requests every month for advice on how to get into the games industry – either on the magazine writing side or the actual development bit. If you're a keen programmer with an aim of writing your own games though, you might want to check out www.aicasd.aii.edu for information on the new degree in Game Art and Design being run there. The catch? It's in San Diego at the Art Institute of California. Still, if you're really keen on doing it then there's nothing stopping you from applying…





SONIC BOOM

When SEGA said late last year that it was planning to release a new *Sonic* game on GameCube, we got very excited indeed – until we found out it was nothing more than an update of the original *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast. Disappointed? You betcha. But now we've seen the first batch of screenshots from the new version and we have to say it's looking damn fine with improved graphics and connectivity to both the upcoming GBA titles *Sonic Advance 2* and *Sonic Pinball Party*. We might just be wrong after all…





FANTASY THREESOME

SQUARE SET TO PIONEER GBA DISPLAY OPTIONS

Never let it be said that Square don't take pride in the visuals of its products – practically every title it produces looks the part if nothing else. So it should come as no surprise to hear that Squaresoft will be the first developer to include multiple display options depending on your hardware.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance will offer the player three display options, each of which will adjust colours and contrast to best suit the display device – that's one mode each for the Game Boy Advance, GBA SP and the forthcoming Game Boy Player. It's doubtful that the latter will offer any enhanced resolution options, although we can always hope.

This is certainly a step in the right direction and we hope to see many other developers taking this kind of initiative with the multiple methods of GBA gaming that now exist – we'd expect Nintendo to follow suit even if no-one else does.

As for the game itself, it should just have hit shelves all over Japan by now – the Valentine's Day release coincided with that of the GBA SP and the game was available (albeit in limited numbers) bundled with an exclusive Pearl White SP. As one of the least import-friendly titles to grace the handheld, we'll hold on for an English language version before trying it out and although it has now appeared on UK schedules, we're just too impatient to wait until the end of the year.

Since it's due in the States in a few months, we'll fill you in as soon as we get our hands on an American copy.



games™ amnesty

RIDDING GAMERS OF THE SHAME OF OWNING LAME GAMES…

■ Do you have Simpsons shame? Let us help…

Being the arbiters of taste that we are, we have to admit to loving *The Simpsons* – probably one of the funniest cartoons to appear on TV ever (except for maybe *Futurama*… and *Family Guy*). The fact that it's lasted as long as it has is a testament to its success.

In direct contrast to this though, we're pretty sure that all the videogames based on the *Simpsons* licence have sucked. In fact, the only half-decent one to appear on a home console was *Simpsons' Road Rage*, and even then it was just *Crazy Taxi* with *Simpsons* characters in it. Nope, we're sorry – for all the injustice that these games have dealt the greatness that is *The Simpsons*, they have to go into the crusher. And that's where you come in…

So, bought *Simpsons Wrestling*? *Simpsons Skateboarding*? *Krusty's Fun House*? Shame on you. Still, we're here to help – all you have to do is pop it in a padded envelope and send it to us at:

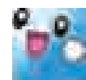
D'OH!
games™
Paragon Publishing
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
Dorset BH1 2JS

Don't worry, we don't blame you.


eMag

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WWW.POKE.MON

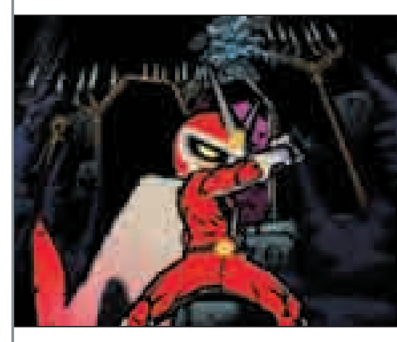
Despite Nintendo's reluctance to give us any accurate information, it's likely that the upcoming GameCube Pokémon game (due out in Japan in May) is going to be an online title. Currently known as *Pokémon Coliseum*, the game looks set to be similar to the N64's *Pokémon Stadium* titles but with a distinctly online slant. What's more, it'll link up with both *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* from the GBA – most likely enabling you to unlock the 186 different Pokémon that can't be unlocked in either game on their own.

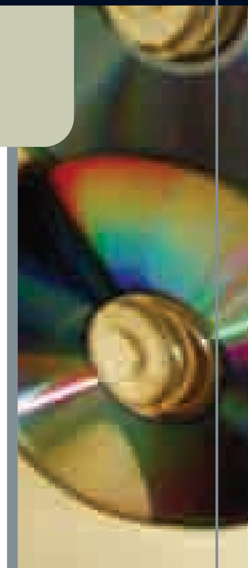




EXCLUSIVE, MY ARSE

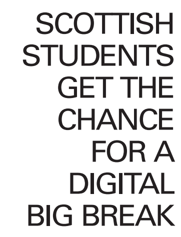
In one of the fastest 'yes it is, no it isn't' turnarounds we've ever seen in the games industry, Capcom has denied that four of the five games it announced at the end of last year are to be GameCube exclusive. Citing a mix-up in communication as the reason why the original statement was made, Capcom has said that only *Resident Evil 4* will be a GameCube-exclusive title – *Viewtiful Joe, Killer 7, Dead Phoenix* and *PN03* will all appear on other next-gen consoles as well. Bah.

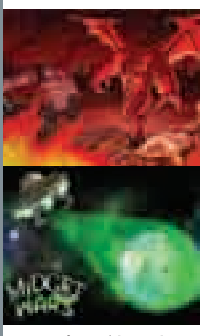




SCOTTISH STUDENTS GET THE CHANCE FOR A DIGITAL BIG BREAK

WHO DARES WINS





Some of the previous winners have now formed their own companies.

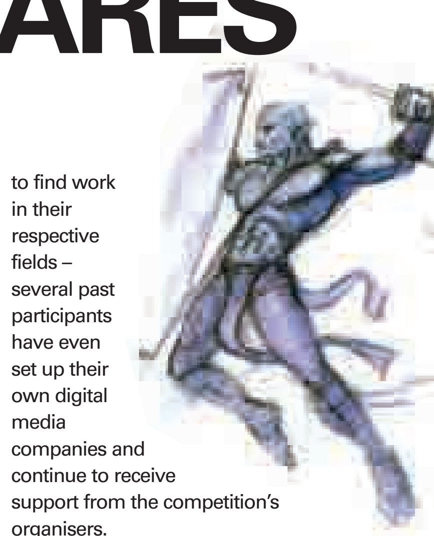


Dare To Be Digital, a Scottish venture that gives students the opportunity to develop digital products (be they videogames, animation or websites), was launched at the end of January.

The competition, which is being sponsored by leading Scottish developer VIS Entertainment Plc (best known for developing the PS2 title, *State of Emergency*) as well as BBC Scotland, Dundee City Council, Henderson Loggie and technology firm NCR, is open to all undergraduates and postgraduates at Scottish universities or art colleges.

The aim of the initiative is to give participants an introduction to the world of multimedia development and every effort has been taken to ensure that the competition replicates the experience of developing in the real world. The first round involves the teams of five students submitting their proposals which will be judged by industry experts who will be looking for innovative ideas and, of course, commercial viability.

Those that make the cut will be given full use of the computer labs and facilities at the University of Abertay for the duration of the summer holidays. In that time, the teams will have to produce a working prototype of their initial concept and create a business plan that will clearly show just how they intend to make money from it. Again, these will be judged by some of the biggest names in the games in interactive industries. Previous winners have gone on to find work in their respective fields – several past participants have even set up their own digital media companies and continue to receive support from the competition's organisers.



Kris van der Kuyl, MD of VIS Entertainment Plc said: "Dare To Be Digital is a unique way to let the next generation of developers find out exactly what it takes to succeed in today's highly competitive markets." At a time when small software developers are finding it hard to survive, it's good to see that new talent is being fostered in such a way, a sentiment echoed by Mark Grossi, Chief Technology Officer of NCR: "Intellectual capital is becoming increasingly important to the future of the IT industry". Here at **games**™, we're particularly looking forward to taking a look at the proposals of the teams that make it through to the finals in the summer and we'll certainly be following this competiton with great interest.

Application forms and rules for entry can be found at: www.daretobedigital.com. Last date for entries is 14 April 2003.



The industry needs you – what are you waiting for?




eMag



ZOMBIES ARE SO LAST SEASON, DARLING – WHEN IT COMES TO MODERN SURVIVAL HORROR WHAT YOU NEED ARE VIRUS-CARRYING SLUGS, ROTTING BABOONS AND A CENTIPEDE THAT LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN LIVING IN A GROW BAG FOR SIX MONTHS. WE TALKED TO THE MAN WHO'S TAKEN THE RESIDENT EVIL SERIES IN A WHOLE NEW DIRECTION…

> "IF I HAD MORE TIME THERE ARE OTHER THINGS THAT I WOULD HAVE ADDED, BUT EVERYTHING I WANTED TO PUT INTO THE GAME [RE ZERO] IS IN THERE"
>
> TATSUYA MINAMI

TATSUYA MINAMI

CAPCOM JAPAN

Okay, we'll admit it – the very first *Resident Evil* game scared the bejesus out of us when it came out on the PSone back in 1996. At the time, there was nothing else like it – *Alone In The Dark* might have been its predecessor, but it wasn't exactly frightening – and even now, we'd have trouble playing the GameCube remake alone if it wasn't for the fact that we know what's coming. Of course, *Resident Evil Zero* is an entirely new kettle of zombies; needless to say, we brought a sofa in especially, in case we needed something to hide behind. Having run through *RE Zero* a couple of times now though, there's one word that sums up the most prominent aspect of the game for us – bugs. Lots of bugs, to be precise. Certainly, there are more than a few T-Virus victims to be found early on, but things take a much more slimy turn a little later.

"There's no doubt that zombies play an important part in this game – it's *Resident Evil* after all, so that goes without saying," says Tatsuya Minami, General Manager of Capcom's Production Studio 3 and producer of *RE Zero*. "However, as we proceeded with creating this prequel, it was necessary for us to add a few changes to tie in with the story. We needed a way of setting the scene of how the virus first spread, hence the more natural monsters rather than just zombies." Good thing we're not afraid of insects then – well, apart from moths. Nasty little buggers.

This recent switch from the more traditional lumbering beasties might not be to everyone's taste, simply because it's a bit of a change from what the *Resident Evil* series has featured in the past. As the saying goes though, a change is as good as a rest; especially if it means bringing something new to a series that's been accused of resting on its laurels in the past. "It's a challenge creating a new game because it's difficult to please everyone, especially when dealing with an established series like *Resident Evil*," Minami-san says. "It's natural to receive criticism from people if you try to add new elements or change something that's already there."

The biggest complaint that crops up time and time again about the *Resident Evil* games has to stem from the rather staid control system. So why didn't they change it for *RE Zero*? Minami-san, it seems, isn't the type to budge from a decision once he's made it. "Having looked at issues like the controls from several angles I'd say we've got the ideal set-up for *RE Zero*," he says firmly. "And besides, I think the control system adds to the atmosphere." He might be right, considering that trying to run away from zombie hordes in a blind panic adds to the scare factor, but we doubt that'll stop people complaining.

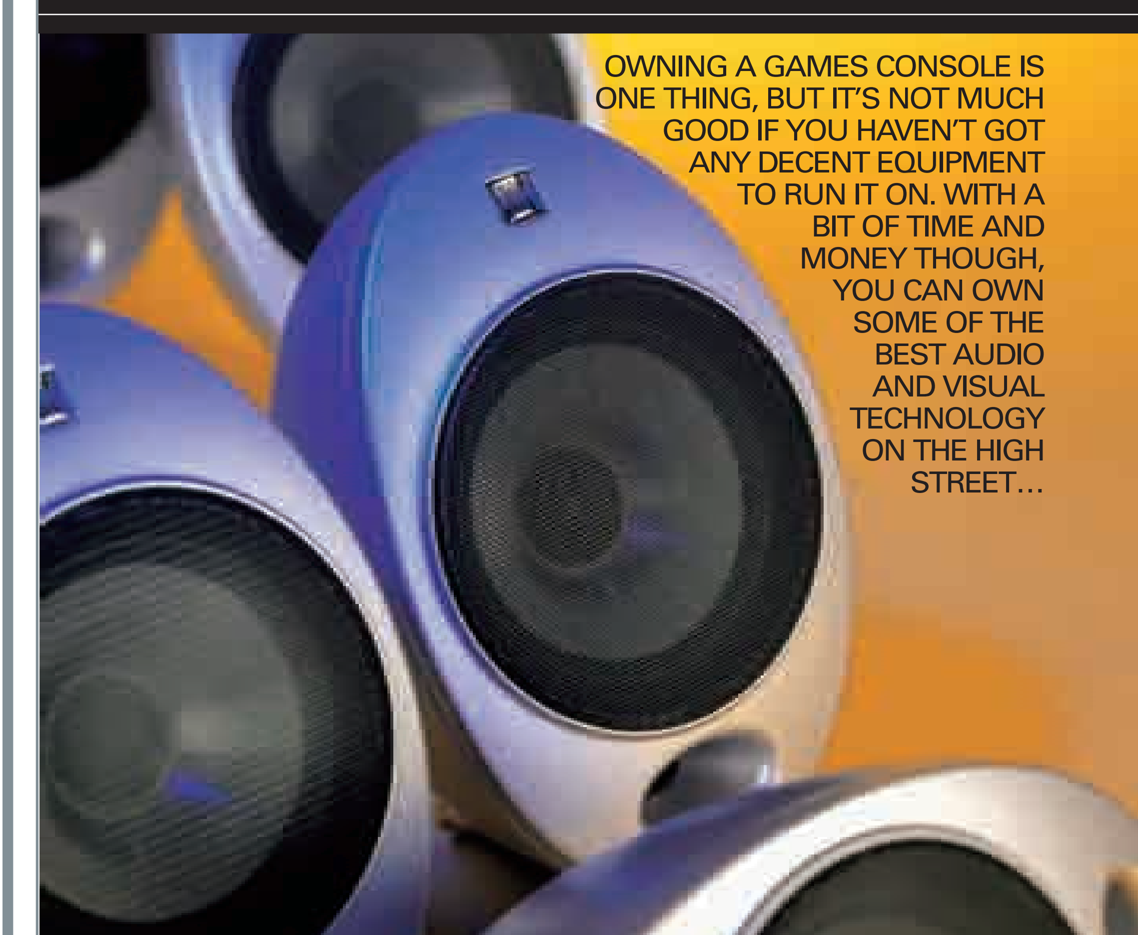
Of course, making a major change like that would ruin the whole atmosphere of the game – not ideal for a title that practically invented the term 'survival horror'. Thankfully, where some of the *Resident Evil* sequels lost some of that fright factor by trying to make the player jump every five minutes, *RE Zero* manages to capture a good mixture of suspense and scares. "It's always important to keep a healthy balance between tension that makes players think something is just around the corner and actually making them jump out of their seats," says Minami-san. " Of course, you can't do that for the whole game or the player would get used to it. That's why we've tried to come up with different horror elements that keep the player on the edge of their seat through the entire adventure."

With *RE Zero* behind him, Minami-san is currently putting the finishing touches to *Clock Tower 3* – the next part of a series that, while not well-known in the West, is hugely popular with Japanese gamers. Of course, working on a game that isn't so mainstream doesn't make Minami-san's job any easier – when asked about moving from one title to another, he insists: "*Clock Tower 3* and *RE Zero* are totally different titles, but you're always under a huge amount of pressure when working on any new game". Nevertheless, completing a project that'll be judged by so many people is obviously a relief. "I have to say I feel released now that I'm working away from the *Resident Evil* series," Minami-san admits. "*Resident Evil 4* is currently in development, but that's being carried out by a different team to mine. I'm excited to see how it turns out, but I don't want to work on it myself." Could it be that even Minami-san has had his fill of zombies and nightmares? Probably not – but we'll leave the light on for him, just in case…

RE Zero *is released on 7 March on the GameCube and reviewed on page 94.* Clock Tower 3 *is due for release on the PlayStation2 later this year.*



BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED



OWNING A GAMES CONSOLE IS ONE THING, BUT IT'S NOT MUCH GOOD IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT ANY DECENT EQUIPMENT TO RUN IT ON. WITH A BIT OF TIME AND MONEY THOUGH, YOU CAN OWN SOME OF THE BEST AUDIO AND VISUAL TECHNOLOGY ON THE HIGH STREET…

So, you own a games console or maybe even more than one – good for you, welcome to the club. But no matter which one you own (which is usually the biggest sticking point for gamers who haven't quite realised that it's the games themselves that matter, not which console you own), the question you've got to ask yourself is: are you getting the most out of your gaming?

If you're sitting in your bedroom, running your console through an RF aerial cable into a 14-inch portable television, the answer is most definitely no – while this kind of set-up might be fine for the casual gamer or the average younger gamer who has all their gaming goodies bought for them by their parents, it's not exactly ideal for the more hard-core videogame enthusiasts amongst us.

While not wanting to go down the highly pretentious route of proclaiming games to be 'art, dah-ling', it's fair to say that gaming is meant to be as immersive an experience as watching a really good movie – that's why it makes sense that you should be doing it through the best medium available to you.

Obviously though, getting your hands on the best home entertainment equipment money can buy isn't going to happen just like that – not unless you win the lottery or rob a bank, at least.

Seeing as how most of us here are adults though (in body, anyway), it's only right to think that with a bit of careful saving – or a big fat loan from the bank, followed by years of repayments – you too can improve your gaming experience tenfold simply by buying the right kind of television and sound system.

All you need to know is exactly what sort of things to look for. It can be hard not to be swayed by flashy advertising, and don't assume that something is of a higher quality because it's the most expensive thing in the shop. And listening to the advice of your friendly sales assistant isn't always the way to go…

VISION

While graphics aren't the be all and end all of a good game, the importance of being able to display each game to the best of its ability cannot be stressed highly enough. For that though, you'll obviously need a decent TV – preferably one that has more than one SCART socket to accommodate all the consoles you own (unless you get an RGB-compatible switch box – Argos does one for under £10). We doubt you'll find a quality TV for less than £600, but as you won't need to buy another one for ages if you make the right purchase, it's money well spent.

Those of you with obscene amounts of cash to spend should probably look at getting a plasma screen, if only for their sheer size and quality. The Pioneer PDP503-HDE boasts a whopping 50-inch screen and has plenty of extras to make it worth the £8,000 (!) asking price. Not only does it come with three SCART sockets, a TV tuner and its own speakers – something most other plasma screens don't offer – but it's Progressive Scan compliant (see our Cable section over the page), which means compatible games will look even better than ever.

CHEAP AS CHIPS

Of course, not everyone has that sort of cash lying around so a little further down the price ladder is the Philips Pixel Plus 36PW9607 at a slightly more affordable £2,000. Coming complete with its own Pro Logic speaker system and offering a rather massive 36-inch flat screen, this TV also offers the advantage of the new Pixel Plus technology – an advanced form of picture processing software that doubles the picture image from the normal 1,024 (pixel horizontal) by 625 (line vertical) to a staggering 2,048 by 833 picture. Not surprisingly, that makes everything look impressively sharp. Still, at that price you'd expect it to be good…

Still out of your league? Never fear – if it's just a basic gaming television that you're after then you should probably take a look at the Sharp 66GF64H. Yes, it 'only' has a 28-inch screen, a pair of surround speakers and doesn't have much more than the usual SCART/S-Video input combination, but then anyone looking for a TV that'll play games and make them look good for a reasonable £750 can't ask for anything more. The choice, as they say, is yours. If you've got the cash, that is.

"THE PIONEER PDP503-HDE TV BOASTS A WHOPPING 50-INCH SCREEN AND HAS PLENTY OF EXTRAS TO MAKE IT WELL WORTH THE £8,000 ASKING PRICE"

SOUND

As you'd expect, having a decent picture is only half the experience if you want to get the best from your gaming. As games these days have such impressive soundtracks (particularly Japanese games such as the *Final Fantasy* series or *The Legend Of Zelda*), it's important to get your sound as clear as possible. Obviously, most people get by with just the basic speakers that come with practically any television set, but the purists among us will want something more.

Again though, it's a pricey business getting yourself a proper digital sound set-up, mainly because it's virtually impossible to get a decent set of speakers, a decoder and a top-quality amplifier in the same package. Ideally, you'll want to buy separates although as this could set you back a cool £3,000, it's a choice that you might want to think about before taking the plunge.

PUMP UP THE VOLUME

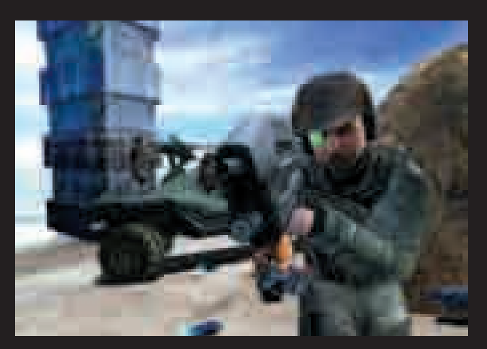
When it comes to speakers, pricier models tend to be better. The Celestion Soundstyle 300 comes in at a hefty £1,199 but manages to back up its cost by featuring some of the finest and most attractive speakers around. The bass is suitably booming, while the front and rear speakers do their job perfectly for picking up the surround on games of all genres – what's more, orchestral scores sound astonishingly good.

If it's value you're after, you could do a lot worse than the Crane Audio Oceana; it's a mile cheaper than the Celestion model at £650 (although it doesn't look half as nice) and manages to dominate any reasonably-sized room with its size and output. The fact that they're full-sized speakers as opposed to a smaller sub-woofer/satellite variety means that you've instantly got a better quality of sound.

Of course, there is the cheaper option of going for a console-specific set-up (coming not only with a sub-woofer and satellite speakers, but a digital decoder as well) as opposed to a full-blown bunch of separates. If that's your thing, see page 25 for more details.

"THERE'S THE CHEAPER OPTION OF GOING FOR A CONSOLE-SPECIFIC SET-UP RATHER THAN A FULL-BLOWN BUNCH OF SEPARATES"

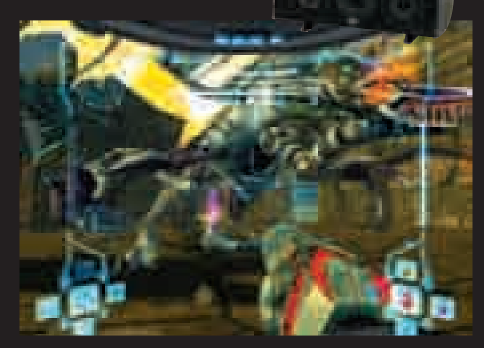
OMD: NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC



If you're looking for a game with great music and sound on the Xbox, it has to be *Halo* every time. While *Jet Set Radio Future* ranks up there in terms of composition, *Halo* manages to excel on not only the musical side, but also with effects and speech quality.



The *Final Fantasy* series has always been known for the quality of the music, so running the first PlayStation2 instalment, *Final Fantasy X*, through a high-end sound system makes all the difference. Some of the melodies are just breathtaking.



Although not quite as beautiful, *Metroid Prime* is a perfect example of a game's atmosphere being enhanced tenfold by the benefits of a quality sound system. Pounding effects and some quality tunes make you feel like you're actually there with Samus.

CABLES

The cables that connect your console with your TV are almost as important as the machines themselves. When it comes to cables, people fall into two categories – those who use whatever comes with the console and those of us who know better. The most important things in cabling are three little letters – RGB. An RGB SCART picture beats the one you'd get through an S-Video cable hands down. While S-Video handles the whole image at once, RGB SCART carries each colour signal separately and therefore produces a crisper, clearer picture. In fact, it's only with a Component input (only used on HDTVs and plasma screens) that you can get a picture better than RGB.

HIGH WIRE ACT

Most televisions bought within the last few years have RGB SCART input – if your TV has more than one SCART socket, it'll usually be the first one that's RGB-compatible. Buying an RGB cable depends on which console you're going to be using. Getting an RGB cable for a PS2 is easy as most dedicated SCART cables (as opposed to composite cables with a SCART block attached) for the machine tend to be RGB-compliant already. Don't forget though that running a PS2 through RGB renders the DVD playback unwatchable so it might be wise to have an S-Video cable handy for DVD sessions.

For an Xbox, you'll have to buy an official Microsoft Advance SCART Cable (£24.99 from most videogame shops) which, as well as offering an RGB signal, houses an optical output that can be used to connect your Xbox to digital sound. For the GameCube, it's simply a matter of picking up an official GameCube RGB Cable (£24.99). If you own an import GameCube you'll need to pay about £50 for a specialist GameCube RGB cable from your local import shop.

Of course, if you own all three consoles and don't want to buy three separate RGB cables, Logic 3's GXP871N cable (£14.99) has a three-way plug (one for each console), a SCART output and an S-Video connector – handy for PS2 DVD playback.

"WHEN IT COMES TO CABLES, SOME PEOPLE USE WHATEVER COMES WITH THE CONSOLE WHILE THERE ARE THOSE WHO KNOW BETTER"

PERIPHERALS

Say 'peripherals' to any regular gamer and the first thing that they'll think of is probably going to be a controller – after all, it's the one thing you have to own before you can even think of playing a game. Of course, all consoles come with a controller so the need for buying extra ones only arises from the joys of multiplayer gaming (unless you've got an Xbox, in which case buying a Controller S to replace the clunky original is more of a necessity than a desire).

However, controllers aren't the only things that fall into the peripheral category – there's a whole bundle of items that, while not immediately obvious, are very desirable and essential for anyone who's truly fanatical about their games.

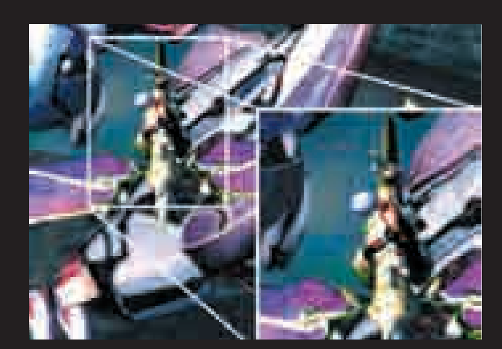
CONTROL YOURSELF

When it comes to peripherals, the key word to remember is 'official' – while third-party peripheral companies such as JOYTECH, Logic 3, Thrustmaster and 4Gamers all make console add-ons that cost a fraction of the price, you just can't beat something that's got the official brand. At least, that's certainly the case with controllers – you'd never catch us picking up anything other than the official Controller S for the Xbox, WaveBird for the GameCube and Dual Shock 2 for the PlayStation2. Sometimes though, certain companies take advantage of the official status and use it to bump up the price tag – £28 for a memory card? Sod off, Sony. Similarly, it's impossible to play DVDs on the Xbox (easily the console of choice for watching movies) without picking up the DVD Playback unit – so that's another (admittedly essential) £19.99 down the tubes.

Saying that though, there are hundreds of add-ons you could throw your cash at. Perhaps sir would like a PS2 Multitap, or a 251 Memory Card for your GameCube? If you're a racing enthusiast, a steering wheel might take your fancy – the WilliamsF1 Team Racing Wheel is pretty nifty, even if it does look like a Tonka toy. There are even more peripherals in the pipeline, and they're all in the form of connectivity products ranging from the GameCube Modem Adaptor and the Xbox Live Headset to the choice of either Broadband or Narrowband Adaptors for the PS2. How did we manage without them?

"SOMETIMES BRAND-NAME STATUS IS USED TO BUMP UP THE PRICE – £28 FOR A MEMORY CARD? SOD OFF, SONY"

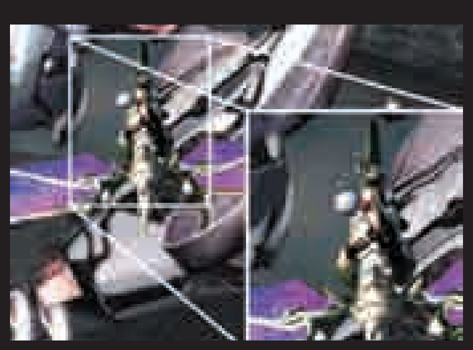
THE CABLE GUY: ALL THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH...



Even though it's believed to be the superior form of video signal by some (mainly because it's called 'super-video'), an S-Video cable gives you a poorer quality picture compared to RGB or Component. The colour might be stronger, but so is the blurring.



RGB SCART is the best form of signal for the average gamer. Most TVs available today accept it and the small cost for a decent RGB cable far outweighs the benefits you get from a clearer, sharper picture. A must for all consoles.



If you're super-rich and own an HDTV or plasma screen, you'll be able to take advantage of Component inputs – split into three separate plugs carrying a single signal in each, it allows you to play games in Progressive Scan mode (if they're compatible).

INSPIRE 5.1 CONSOLE 5500D

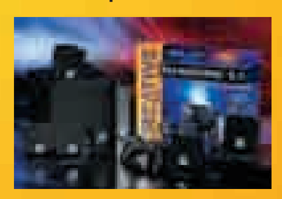
Developer: Creative Labs **Price:** £149.99 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available From: www.europe.creative.com
For use with: All consoles/DVD
Decoder: Dolby Digital/Pro Logic
Inputs: 1x Optical, 1x Coaxial, 1x Analogue
Total RMS Output: 48 Watts
Test Mode: Yes
Remote Control: Yes
Cables: Optical, Coaxial, Phono

If you know your gaming sound equipment, you'll know Creative. Mainly famous for its PC soundcards, the audio giant has now turned its attention to consoles as well. This console-specific sound system is both stylish and functional, with a decent amount of output for the price. Unfortunately, the speaker cables are a little short for a decent-sized room (the rear speakers only stretch a measly five metres), which can make positioning the satellites behind you slightly more difficult than you might hope. Nevertheless, the sub-woofer is subtle but effective while the speakers offer a clear level of sound – proof that the art of a good sound system isn't just its ability to make the ground shake.

gamesTM AWARDS

- Most Eye-Pleasing
- Easiest To Set Up
- Most Respected Brand
- Most Unobtrusive
- Shortest Speaker Cables



SPC206 5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM

Developer: 4Gamers **Price:** £129.99 **Release Date:** March '03

Available From: Argos
For use with: All consoles/DVD
Decoder: Dolby Digital
Inputs: 1x Optical, 1x Coaxial, 1x Analogue
Total RMS Output: 60 Watts
Test Mode: Yes
Remote Control: Yes
Cables: Optical, Phono, Xbox Optical SCART, GameCube Adaptor

Less than a year ago, we'd never even heard of 4Gamers – now though, it's among the top third-party peripheral developers in the country. Its pads are good, its portable monitors even better and now there's even a 5.1 speaker system on the shelves. What's more, it's actually a pretty good one; with such a low price tag, you'd expect it to be slightly sub-standard compared to more expensive set-ups, but, in fact, it's a pretty booming piece of kit.

Certainly, it's not the nicest sound system to look at but considering the price, the quality is a damn sight more than you'd expect. Anyone looking to keep the purse strings pulled in and still get a decent sound system need look no further…

gamesTM AWARDS

- Best Value For Money
- Highest RMS Output
- Heaviest Sub-Woofer
- Most Extra Cables
- Most Uninteresting Decoder



SOUNDSTATION 5.1

Developer: Logic 3 **Price:** £199.99 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available From: Various stores
For use with: All consoles/DVD
Decoder: Dolby Digital/Pro Logic
Inputs: 1x Optical, 1x Coaxial, 1x Analogue
Total RMS Output: 45 Watts
Test Mode: Yes
Remote Control: Yes
Cables: Optical

Logic 3's SoundStation range has always impressed in the past as far as quality, low-cost speakers systems go, but when it comes to the SoundStation 5.1 we're a little confused. Considering the £200 price tag, we would have expected a set-up of a higher quality than the one actually produced. Admittedly, the sub-woofer is suitably booming and can be turned up for some floor-trembling experiences, but that seems to be the only real plus point for the whole system. The weaker satellite speakers let the whole thing down, meaning it hardly seems worth the comparatively large amount of money being asked for it. Shame, really… we were hoping that this would be so much better.

gamesTM AWARDS

- Best Pedigree
- Most Expensive
- Longest Speaker Cables
- Most Confusing Decoder
- Least Attractive



HERAO GCD 5.1 SPEAKERS

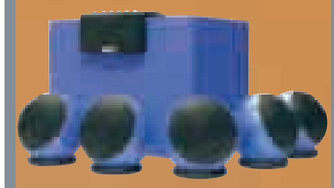
Developer: Herao **Price:** £139.99 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available From: Various stores
For use with: All consoles/DVD
Decoder: Dolby Digital/Pro Logic
Inputs: 1x Optical, 1x Coaxial, 1x Analogue
Total RMS Output: 43 Watts
Test Mode: Yes
Remote Control: Yes
Cables Included: Optical, Phono

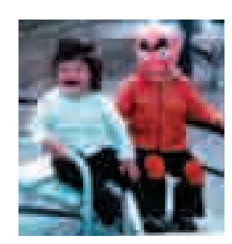
Coming from another company that seems to have just popped up out of the blue, the GCD 5.1 Speaker System is one of several sets available from Herao (they also come in a smaller 2.1 form made specifically for either GameCube or PlayStation2). The odd thing about this system though is that the decoder is actually built into the base unit, making the whole thing larger than you might expect; if you're working with a confined space, you may have problems fitting it in. The satellites are of decent quality and do the job for the price asked, but they do produce a slightly tinny sound when the volume is whacked way up. Either way though, anyone looking for a GameCube-style system might want to try this for size.

gamesTM AWARDS

- Largest Sub-Woofer
- Most Quirky
- Quickest To Set Up
- Weakest RMS Output
- Hardest To Disguise







LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE



"THE CURRENT TREND IS FOR 'CELEBRITY' DATING SHOWS WITH SOME BIMBO ON A BLIND DATE WITH STEVE-O FROM JACKASS"

Just so you know, this isn't the most favourable of times in American gaming. A weary Xbox is being pushed just as hard as it is in Britain – go on! Take it! Two free games! Four! Look, we still have *Splinter Cell*! Here's some footage in case you've forgotten! With the PC version of the Tom Clancy weapons and tactics masterpiece already complete, it wouldn't hurt if Microsoft had a new song to sing. Nintendo meanwhile is trying to convince us that *Resident Evil 2* and *3* are exciting again. Newsflash: they aren't. Is *Re-Animator* a better movie now that it's out on DVD as opposed to videotape? No, it's still a dated, hammy, low budget horror.

The recent period has also been something of a disappointment for slo-mo shoot-out fans such as myself. *Bloodrayne* came out very early compared with Britain's proposed date well into the year, but after inviting this vamp into my home I can report that this tawdry little gothic package is more concerned with peddling a weak and generic form of sex appeal than anything you'd call gameplay. The spindly, ill-proportioned heroine whirls about with all the substance of a leaf caught in a gust of wind – an affliction not lent any great feel by the completely underwhelming 'bloodrage' slow-motion mode.

I also spent an unhappy week with Namco's cash vacuum *Dead To Rights* on PlayStation2, which finally made it out the door of Namco US, though sadly not without taking several employees and an unthinkable sum of money with it (according to some). While generally far more solid than *Bloodrayne*, with a much more graceful bullet-time, the novelty of super slow speed is neutered by no-brainer auto-aiming.

No, the start of 2003 has not been kind at all. It's not like things improve when you switch off the console and find yourself watching TV. The current trend is for 'celebrity' edition dating shows, meaning any number of channels will be showing some poor unsuspecting bimbo from Venice Beach on a blind date with Steve-O from *Jackass*, or an unrecognisable mutant from the *Love Boat* or (pick of the bunch) a grown and bearded Screech of *Saved By The Bell* fame. The news is every bit as desperate, playing ruthlessly on your worst fears to secure your viewership: "Something you have in your kitchen could blind your children! Details later this hour!"

Meanwhile, Fox's morally vacant *Joe Millionaire* tricks two dozen young women into competing for the attention and commitment of a dashing bachelor, heir to a $50 million fortune… only to gleefully inform the lucky chosen gal that there is no fortune and that Joe is a bricklayer. Almost unbelievably, a new show on ABC called *The Will* covers the bitter escapades of a family fighting over the belongings of their beloved dead relative. Who will win? Tune in to the season finalé to find out! However, these soulless creators of junk programming may finally have gotten their hooks in me, given that *The Surreal Life* is just starting. The show is a celebrity *Big Brother* for the US,

“KNOW THIS: THERE IS NO-ONE WHO ENJOYS JUMPING OUT OF CARS AND FIRING NOISY WEAPONS AT PASSERS-BY MORE THAN I”

An Open Letter to Brendan McNamara of Team Soho

Dear Brendan,

Thanks for nothing. Here I am, trying to preach the virtues of gaming life in America and you, sir, have made me look a fool. The Getaway actually made it to British shelves in December. Yet, due to the UK-biased nature of the product, at the time of writing I am one of 287 million US residents to whom your game is unavailable. It s almost 21 January the scheduled release date here but I just know it s going to slip. When I left Britain so many months ago, The Getaway was the biggest joke in games development: over-ambitious, over-budget, over-staffed and way overdue. Like Paul Verhoeven s colossal Hollywood epic, Crusade, or Guns n Roses s cursed Chinese Democracy album, it couldn t possibly come out. Or, should it ever appear, it had to be crap. You must have made a deal with the devil on this one, Brendan; one imagines expedited US distribution could have been part of the bargain had you simply asked.

Know this: there is no-one who enjoys jumping out of cars and firing noisy weapons at passers-by more than I. Given the relaxed attitude to certain laws in the area, I could probably organise the real thing in less time than it would take you to remove all the letter U s from the localization of the instruction manual. Just remember that when you watch the news tonight.

Sincerely,
Mr T. Shape, North America

featuring a particularly appealing blend of cast-offs, scum and has-beens that includes rapper-turned-minister MC Hammer, metal casualty Vince Neil and Eighties movie burnout Corey Feldman. I'll use this forum to notify **games**™ that all future *Letter From America* columns will be late until the end of the series.

Cheers



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Spaced



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Country 92.5 FM



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

CHILI'S

Popular get-you-in, get-you-out burger restaurant with a slight Mexican twist. When Fat Bastard sang: “I want my baby back ribs,” he was mimicking the chain's famous jingle. Mm-mmm.





USA MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Take Two	PS2
2	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Xbox
3	The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers	EA	Multi
4	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	Infogrames	PS2
5	Madden NFL 2003	EA	Multi
6	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Multi
7	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	Multi
8	SOCOM: US Navy Seals	Sony	PS2
9	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	GC
10	James Bond 007: Nightfire	EA	Multi

(Updated 19/01/03)



The awesome *Metroid Prime* has slipped down the charts as the Eighties gangster-fest *GTA: Vice City* continues to be the most popular game in America.

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TOMO OHNO

"DESPITE A GREAT DEAL OF PROGRESS, FEMALE INTEREST IN VIDEOGAMES ISN'T RISING AS MUCH AS THE INDUSTRY MIGHT LIKE"

Moving constantly between Japan and the UK as I do, I often have to resort to being an Englishman rather than a Japanese man when associating with my English colleagues. But because of the culture shock, it's not easy. Rainy days without an umbrella, drinking pint after pint without sitting down, eating the hottest curries and going out with 'the lads' – it's a very macho culture, indeed.

In Japan, the typical stereotypes of Englishmen are people like Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Bean, Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards, Boy George, Pete Burns and Harry Potter – very respectable, very gentlemanly or just plain odd, they don't show the macho side of Britain at all. Of course, David Beckham has done a great job of changing these ideals in recent times… as has the video footage of football hooligans I've seen on the news, I guess.

There's an old saying in Japan that 'no man should ever enter the kitchen' – unsurprisingly, it's still a common belief for Japanese men over 60 years old. But the idea of the dominant man and obedient woman is now outdated and untrue. Men are expected to do their fair share around the house – indeed, there's even a monthly cooking magazine for men.

Personally, I welcome these changes; being the dominant one might sound nice, but it comes with a lonely responsibility. Older generations did not discuss their problems with their wives and were not supposed to show their emotions. Young Japanese men have acquired tastes more akin to the feminine culture – makeup kits for boys are available in most convenience stores, beauty salons are becoming popular among boys and brand-name bags are big news these days. Men's fashion magazines are flooding the market as well – watches and shoes are hot topics for the more fashionable male.

Despite all this progress though, female interest in videogames isn't rising as much as the industry might like. The 2002 Tokyo Game Show had 134,000 visitors, 17% of whom were female. The Japanese games market seems to be missing a massive demographic. I wonder what's keeping women away? Is it the games themselves, the way they are presented or the image of the industry and culture as a whole?

Recently, I bought a PlayStation for my wife. I left it with her when I went out to work, but when I played *Crash Bandicoot Racing* with her for the first time she defeated me without any chivalry of the samurai. Obviously, she had been practising. As the man of the house, this is not good. However, as a modern day husband I believe it's important to have a 'give and take' relationship with my wife instead of being dominant. I hope she doesn't notice that I'm not trying my best, that the bitterness is an act and that the thrown controller was carefully targeted not to cause too much damage. Really, it was.

Kind regards





TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

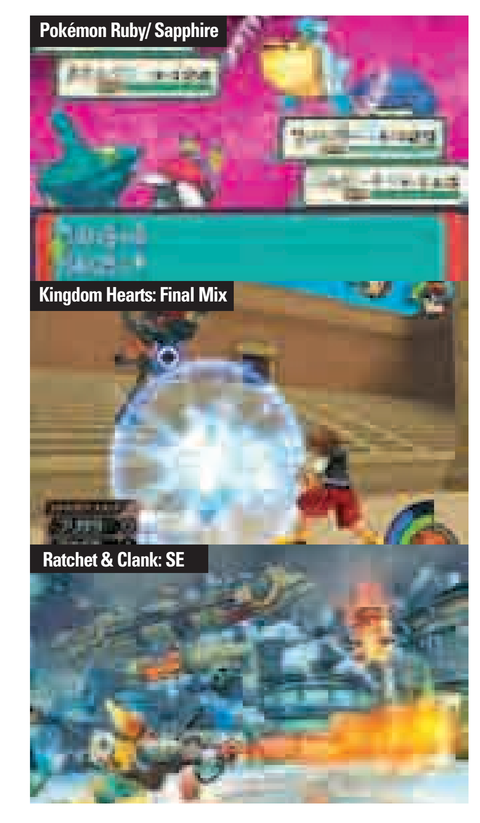
LESSON THREE: ON THE PULL

Watashi no name wa [name] desu	My name is [your name].
O-namae wo kiite-mo iidesu-ka?	May I ask your name?
Anata wa haru ichiban no sakura no yoni utsukushii	You are as beautiful as spring's first cherry blossom.
Shijin ga suki desuka?	Who is your favourite poet?
Anata no hiza ni suwattemo yoroshii deshoka?	Can I sit on your lap?
Omawarisan! Chikan o tska-mate!	Police! Arrest this pervert!

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Pokémon Ruby	Nintendo	GBA
2	Pokémon Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
3	Kingdom Hearts: Final Mix	Square	PS2
4	Ratchet & Clank: Special Edition	Sony	PS2
5	Mario Party 4	Nintendo	GC
6	Momotarou Dentetsu 11	Hudson	PS2
7	The Legend Of Zelda: TWW	Nintendo	GC
8	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	Konami	PS2
9	Unlimited: SaGa	Square	PS2
10	Rockman EX3	Capcom	GBA

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, Week ending 05/01/03)

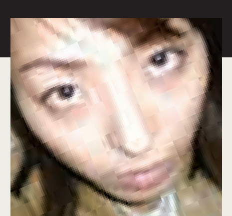


Pokémon Ruby/ Sapphire

Kingdom Hearts: Final Mix

Ratchet & Clank: SE

GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN



In Japan, being a female gamer isn't anything special – it's far more commonplace than in the UK. In fact, many women actually write console games in their spare time. The Japanese games industry itself is certainly male-dominated, but nowhere near as much as in the UK. I personally can't analyze nor judge the reasons behind it, so instead I thought I'd interview a Japanese female gamer to show the different attitudes.

Eri is a Japanese girl in her early twenties, studying at Cambridge – a witty, pretty woman who describes herself as an ex-gamer. I met her completely by chance on a flight to Tokyo…

games™: When did you start playing games?
Eri: It started with *Dragon Quest I & II* on the NES at my friend's house when I was in the fifth grade, then my parents bought me one for Christmas. The very first game I actually bought myself was *Super Mario Brothers 2*.

games™: What was the first game you really got into?
Eri: *Dragon Quest III* was the first game I got my teeth into, during the spring holiday of the fifth grade. Loads of kids I knew had Nintendo at home and it was very popular. I loved the story and the characters. The game itself was a bit too difficult for me, so I asked my friend to finish it for me. I remember commuting to school while singing the theme song to myself…

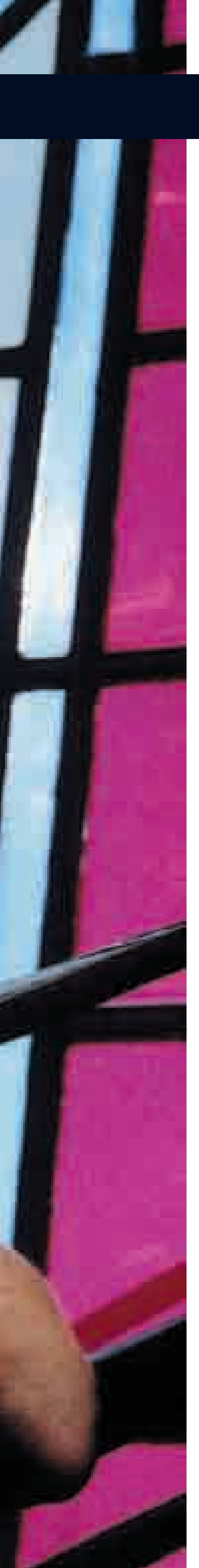
games™: What was your gaming life like?
Eri: I was playing games all day in my room on Sunday; it fitted me better than being in a group. Some girls with brothers had games at home, so we got together to play against each other. When I started junior high school at the age of 13, the SNES came out and I asked my parents for one. This was the first turning point where many of my female gaming friends stopped playing games and became more focused on school work. I completed *Dragon Quest IV* and went into *Final Fantasy*. I used my holiday time to tackle new RPG titles and did not play much during school days. During school holidays, I would spend five or six hours a day playing games and sometimes spent all day finishing a new one. I finished *Final Fantasy IV* in four days without sleeping much. I tried to hide from my parents and pretend I was studying – I had my SNES confiscated more than enough times.

games™: Why did you stop playing?
Eri: At high school, I started concentrating on studying for my college exams and did not have much time left to play games. The PlayStation's graphics impressed me, but they were a bit too complex for me to enjoy. Also, there weren't interesting RPG titles around and I just played some puzzle games for a change. After high school, I couldn't find the time for games and stopped playing altogether.

games™: What will it take to bring you back to playing games?
Eri: Personally, I think the PC is already doubling as a games machine for grown-ups; I can't swallow the idea of buying separate consoles as well. I might be interested if playing console games generated a new kind of communication with others, as it did with PC online gaming. Then I think I'd feel more than just a short-term sense of accomplishment.



CONSIDERING WE CAN'T THINK OF A SINGLE TRULY BAD NINTENDO GAME, WORKING FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE JAPANESE DEVELOPMENT GIANT MUST BE A DODDLE, RIGHT? WELL, NO – IN FACT, IT'S ACTUALLY A LOT HARDER THAN YOU'D THINK. WE SAT DOWN FOR A NATTER WITH NINTENDO EUROPE'S HEAD OF PR TO DISCUSS HER LIFE, LOVES AND THE BIG N ITSELF…



“NINTENDO HAS BEEN MAKING VIDEOGAMES FOR OVER 25 YEARS SO IT REALLY UNDERSTANDS WHAT MAKES A GREAT GAME – ORIGINALITY, CREATIVITY, STORYLINE, CHARACTERS AND THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE”

SHELLY FRIEND

SHELLY FRIEND

NINTENDO EUROPE

games™: A lot of people ask us how they can get into working with videogames; can you tell us how you got into the industry?

Shelly Friend: After university, I worked for a PR agency that specialized in launching US technology companies into Europe. Having worked there for three years, I decided I wanted to move into the entertainment industry instead. I was approached for a job at Nintendo UK (called THE Games at the time) and joined them in 1998 as UK PR manager. I worked in this role for three years, during which time I helped launch Pokémon in the UK. I was then promoted to Head of PR for Nintendo Europe (the position I'm in now) and became responsible for PR activity across the whole of Europe.

You work with videogames all day – do you play them yourself outside of work or do you have other interests?

SF: As I work with videogames every day, I don't play them too much in my spare time. However, I'm a Game Boy fan so I always carry it around with me when I'm travelling. I spend most of my weekends with friends, going out for drinks and dinner. I'm also a big snowboarding fan (I try to go a couple of times a year) and I've just taken up wakeboarding, so I hope to do more of this in the summer.

What is it about Nintendo's games that make them unique?

SF: It's a combination of things really. Nintendo has been making videogames for over 25 years so it really understands what makes a great game and that's a combination of originality, creativity, storyline, characters and the element of surprise. Nintendo is continually looking at ways to improve gameplay and is responsible for nearly all the things you take for granted when playing games today, like the D-pad, rumble pak and wireless controller. Nintendo has also defined all the main game genres that we play today, from RPGs to platformers, and continues to push the boundaries by introducing new gameplay experiences.

What are your favourite games at the moment?

SF: My all-time favourite game is still *Tetris* on Game Boy – even though I've had the game for years I still regularly play it, particularly when I travel. I'm also a big *Zelda* fan. The first *Zelda* game I played was *Ocarina Of Time* on the N64 and found myself getting up really early on Saturday mornings to play it. Right now, I'm really looking forward to *Zelda: The Wind Waker*. So far, I've only played in it Japanese which makes things quite difficult, so I'm looking forward to playing the English-language version. I also love *Pikmin*; in fact, that's what's in my GameCube at the moment.

Nintendo's products have recently become much more accessible to the press and public through Cube Clubs, demo discs, press days and so on. Is this a natural progression for the company or is it a direct result of the pressure from companies like Microsoft and Sony who have always been very open about their developments?

SF: Nintendo has always been fairly secretive about its games – it's been reluctant to show them too early in the development process because the developers were afraid that people would copy their ideas (which has happened in the past). However, it now recognizes the importance of showing the games early to the games press and the public, which is why it will continue to hold events throughout the year to enable people to play the games prior to launch.

Nintendo has always had a reputation for producing games aimed at kids, even though its titles have a very broad appeal. Do you think that Nintendo will ever be able to shake its original image?

SF: People like to pigeonhole Nintendo as a company for younger gamers but this simply isn't the case; Nintendo has always focused on making great games that everyone wants to play. You only have to look at the range of games available on GameCube and Game Boy Advance to see that. At the end of the day, Nintendo will continue to make great games that cater for any age and any gaming taste.

You work for one of the most respected games companies in the world – would you ever consider a career change?

SF: Nintendo is such a great company to work for that it's difficult to imagine working anywhere else. However, if I was going to have a career change, I'd probably go to the US and train to be snowboarding instructor.

Nintendo's next big GameCube title, Metroid Prime*, is released on 21 March. It scored 10 /10 in issue 2 of* **games**™

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, GAMES™ GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE GO TO LONDON TO CATCH UP WITH AN EXCITING NEW BRITISH COMPANY.



ELIXIR STUDIOS

COME WITH US TO CAMDEN TOWN AND FIND OUT WHY ELIXIR STUDIOS IS SET TO BE ONE OF THE MOST TALKED ABOUT BRITISH DEVELOPERS OF THE YEAR

Camden Town tends to be a place where all sorts of artistic and creative events take place. As well as the popular market, this small corner of London is also home to numerous recording studios, printing companies and even Jim Henson's world famous Creature Shop – creators of characters from *The Muppets, The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*. It's also here, just around the corner from all the hustle and bustle of the busy High Street, that the talented employees of Elixir Studios do their magic. In fact, they've been doing their magic here for the past four years, yet they're still relatively unknown; the reason being that their first title, *Republic*, is still a few months from completion. "When you start a company, you don't have any technology, so you have to develop it at the same time as you developing a game," says Adrian Bolton, who, despite his official title of Executive Producer, is involved with virtually every aspect of this unique project. "We're not actually announcing an official release date yet, until we go beta," adds Demis Hassabis, who, at the age of just 26, already has a long list of achievements behind him, including his position as Chairman and CEO of Elixir.

Though it's taken four years for production to get this far, it's clear just by looking at the game where the time has gone. Even though there's still work to be done before the code is ready for release, the title has already won acclaim for its innovative design and ambitious graphics engine. Dubbed 'Totality', the engine is said to be capable of handling an infinite number of polygons, meaning that details as

The Elixir Studios are some of the nicest we've visited. Spread over two floors, each of the four offices has stylish brick walls and wooden floors. Contemporary art hangs on the walls and everything has an air of sophistication.

The Elixir offices are very calm, the only noise coming from fingers on keyboards.

RENDERS

CG renders were used to give an indication of what the finished game might look like. Amazingly, Elixir has been able to recreate such imagery almost perfectly in-game.

SKETCHES

The early concept drawings indicate the in-depth approach Elixir is taking with regards to building structures. It's clear that Russian architecture has been carefully researched.

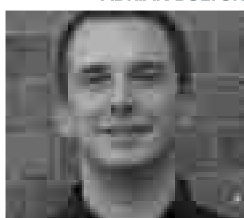
The main man Demis Hassabis sits down to work at his computer. Rather than sitting separately, his desk is situated in the main office, amongst the workforce.

insignificant as the single petals of a flower in a window box can be individually rendered. Because of this magnificent work of visual engineering, the gameplay (which is equally ingenious) is often left out of the equation altogether. Adrian Bolton admits that the game's visuals have been attracting the most attention: "Ironically, although AI and gameplay are much more important to us than anything, most people are interested in our graphics engine" he says. "You can talk as much as you like about what your game is all about, but people are wowed by how it looks."

We can't help feeling that if people are wowed by how *Republic* looks then they'll be even more impressed with the gameplay. Your basic aim is to become president of the Republic of Novistrama – a fairly straightforward objective, but one that's made incredibly in-depth by the level of interactivity the player has with the city's people. How you rally support is up to you – whether it's through your economic policies, through brainwashing or blackmailing, the choice is yours. "It's quite a unique premise for a game", says Hassabis, who was planning *Republic* before he even founded Elixir. "It's a combination of three things," he says. "I read a really good book called *Crowds And Power* by Elias Canetti, which basically attempts to explain the whole of human history in terms of crowd theory. Then there was this fantastic board game I played at university called Junta – it was set in South America and was very tongue in cheek. The basic premise behind the game was of becoming president, which I thought was extremely cool. And, lastly, real world events – I love news footage, watching the news and current affairs." It's fairly obvious

"YOU CAN TALK AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE ABOUT WHAT YOUR GAME IS ABOUT, BUT PEOPLE ARE WOWED BY HOW IT LOOKS"

ADRIAN BOLTON





Republic is inhabited by regular people doing everyday things. It's possible to watch each of them performing their daily routines.

A GAME OF POWER

Elixir's first project is just about as ambitious as they come…

Despite being a few months away from launch, *Republic* already looks set to be one of the most talked about PC games of the year. Having been in development for the best part of four years, the game breaks the mould of convention in more ways than one…

"Starting with a single loyal supporter, a tiny secret HQ and a very small base of local support, you must build up a nationwide faction powerful enough to oust the President and rule the Republic of Novistrama. Three other factions, each with their own agendas, will be vying for power with you. And, of course, most formidably of all, the President will go to any lengths necessary to hold onto power" – Elixir Studios

INSPIRATION

Elixir's CEO, Demis Hassabis, reveals the three things that influenced the development of *Republic*

THE BOOK

[*CROWDS AND POWER*, BY ELIAS CANETTI]

What the book says about itself: "*Crowds And Power* is a revolutionary work in which Elias Canetti finds a new way of looking at human history and psychology. Breathtaking in its range and erudition, it explores Shiite festivals and the English Civil War, the finger exercises of monkeys and the effects of inflation in Weimar Germany. In this study of the interplay of crowds, Canetti offers one of the most profound and startling portraits of the human condition."

THE BOARD GAME [JUNTA]

What the game says about itself: "Junta is the game of power, intrigue, money and revolution in an all too familiar banana republic. In this multi-player game, the players, as the ruling families of la Republica, connive, cajole, threaten and ally their way to the fattest Swiss bank account."

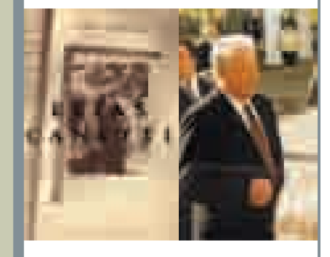
THE BORIS [CURRENT AFFAIRS]

News broadcasts were one of the main factors that influenced the creative direction of *Republic*, most notably the events surrounding the former Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, and his last few terms in power.

"THE UNIQUE GRAPHICS ENGINE IS SAID TO BE CAPABLE OF HANDLING AN INFINITE NUMBER OF POLYGONS, MEANING THAT DETAILS AS INSIGNIFICANT AS THE SINGLE PETALS OF A FLOWER IN A WINDOW BOX CAN BE INDIVIDUALLY RENDERED"



Republic centres on Russian politics and was influenced by a book, a board game and news broadcasts. Few games deal with such intelligent subject matter.



where each of these things have influenced the creation of *Republic* – the aim of the game is very similar to Junta, while the visuals and atmosphere mimic the images of mobs and crowds we see on the news every week. But while the core idea hasn't really changed that much since its inception, elements such as atmosphere and dramatic structure have evolved due to the influence of popular movies (amongst other things). In particular, movies that deal with political affairs or crowds of people have been scoured for scenes that may aid production. "Even films like *Evita*", explains Hassabis. "When she's talking to the whole crowd it can be quite powerful."

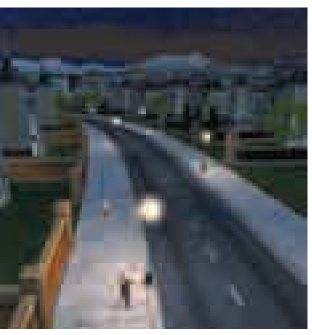
Of course, trying to create crowd dynamics similar to those in *Evita* is no easy task – just imagine the complex maths required to prevent hundreds of polygonal characters from glitching through one another whilst crammed together in a city square. Even so, lead programmer Jamie Doornbos doesn't seem to be having too many problems, despite having only been involved with the project for a little over a year. "It's changed quite a bit," reveals Doornbos, who was previously lead programmer on *The Sims*, having landed a job at Maxis directly after leaving school. "Things are a little bit more organised and streamlined," he adds, suggesting that the past year has seen a bit of a shake-up as Elixir has made production more efficient in order to get the game finished. Despite the pressure though, Doornbos is surprisingly relaxed about the project, saying: "It's not that complicated really". However, in contrast to his modest opinion (and most probably to avoid underselling the game to us), Bolton suggests quite the opposite. "There are lots of complications", he states convincingly. "Say a 24-hour slot is only five minutes long, then that means that everyone is leaving the apartment block at the same time. You have to balance those sort of things."

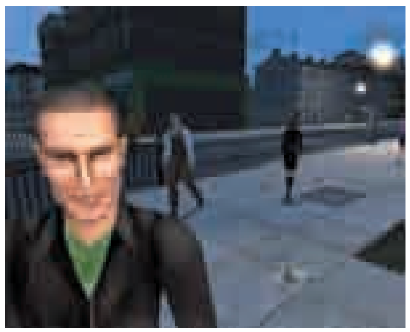
Indeed, crowd dynamics are one thing, but programming every resident of an enormous city to behave naturally is another; even everyday occurrences, such as two people meeting in the street, are a potential disaster. How, for example, would two citizens pass by each other without appearing robotic and unnatural? Well, Elixir has a few clever tricks up its sleeves: "They detect each other in advance," reveals Doornbos. "They have a certain look ahead along the path. If they see someone coming up ahead, they'll split off to the side, then merge back into their normal path," he explains. But, despite such clever routines, Doornbos has also been working on some simpler dynamics to save on processing power. "Sometimes we have separate lanes, so they pass by the side of one another," he says. In these

"I'VE BEEN CREATING A LOT OF DOCUMENTATION WHICH IS AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE TO ENSURE WE'RE ALL WORKING TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL"
ADRIAN CARLESS

[FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]
Adrian Carless
Jamie Doornbos
Adrian Bolton
Demis Hassabis

■ Even at night there are things going on in your city. How will your policies affect the crime rate?







situations, the people simply remain on a set route – sort of like a train on a railway track.

Doornbos has also been working closely with lead designer Adrian Carless to ensure that the control interface is as user-friendly as can be. "I've been creating a lot of documentation which is as clear as possible to ensure we're all working towards a common goal," says Carless, who has the impossible role of tying all the visuals and maths together with the gameplay. Along with the rest of the *Republic* team, Carless is designing the game to subtly guide the player in their decisions, rather than either forcing them in a singular direction or confusing them with pages of numbers and text. However, for players who enjoy such complexity all the stats will be available for viewing if they so wish.

With a work force of 60 people and some of the most up-to-date offices we've ever visited, it'll be interesting to see how Elixir evolves. The company is already busy at work developing new technology for other projects, as well as working on at least one other title, which will be unveiled shortly. "We'll probably make an announcement about our second project at E3," says Hassabis, who, unsurprisingly, wouldn't divulge any further details at this stage. Of course, it shouldn't be too long before we all get to sample Elixir's first finished product, although we suspect the Q1 2003 release date (decided by Eidos) will be pushed back by a few months. Because of this uncertain release date, it's difficult to predict exactly how good the game will be, though judging by what we've seen already, we should be in for a real treat – after all, great graphics *and* the chance to be president? Sounds good. And if any company can make such an elaborate project work, it's Elixir. With some of the most ambitious young designers and programmers working alongside a handful of industry veterans, Elixir is one British company that simply can't be ignored.

1 Name: Adrian Carless
Job Title: Lead Designer
Favourite Game(s): *Starcraft*
Greatest Achievement: Being in the games industry for 17 years

2 Name: Jamie Doornbos
Job Title: Lead Programmer
Favourite Game(s): *Sim City*
Greatest Achievement: Lead Programmer on *The Sims*

3 Name: Adrian Bolton
Job Title: Executive Producer
Favourite Game(s): *Speedball 2*
Greatest Achievement: Surviving the games industry

4 Name: Demis Hassabis
Job Title: Chairman and CEO
Favourite Game(s): *Carrier Command* and *Civilization*
Greatest Achievement: "I've got this terrible habit – I always get told by friends that the moment I achieve anything I always think, oh well, that was a bit rubbish then." Despite his modesty, Demis has achieved the following:
- Taught himself to play chess at the age of four
- Taught himself programming at the age of seven
- Chess Master at the age of 12 (highest ranked player of his age in the world)
- Co-wrote *Theme Park* at the age of 17
- Achieved a double first in computer science at Cambridge University
- Senior Programmer on *Black & White*
- Won seven medals at both the 1998 and 1999 Mind Sports Olympiads
- Founder of Elixir Studios

RELEASE LISTS



Tenchu 3 PS2 Just like the original, only better. Check it out on page 60.

Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner PS2 More like a Japanese cartoon than before.

Toca Race Driver PC, Xbox This should benefit from the additional power of PC and Xbox.



MOST PLAYED

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

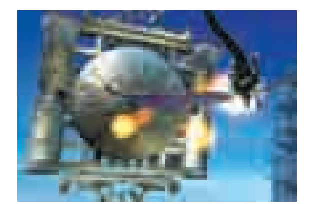
We're pleased to report that this doesn't disappoint. Just as you'd expect, Nintendo has introduced some clever new ideas, even though the core gameplay remains much unchanged from *Ocarina Of Time*. And the vibrant graphical style is superb.



PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Infogrames

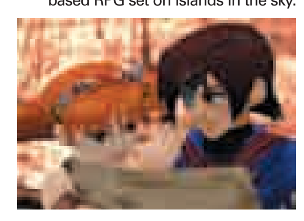
After numerous delays, Smilebit's *Panzer Dragoon Orta* has finally gone on sale in Japan and America. The game can be finished within a few hours, but the sheer experience has kept us coming back for more. On top of that, there are many extras to earn, including the original SEGA Saturn game.



SKIES OF ARCADIA

Format: Dreamcast
Publisher: SEGA

We should have received our import version of GameCube *Skies Of Arcadia* by the time you read this, and we recently dug out the Dreamcast in anticipation. Thankfully, it's as good as we remember. If you never got round to playing it, *Skies Of Arcadia* is a turn-based RPG set on islands in the sky.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '03			
21 Feb	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
21 Feb	The Sims	Electronic Arts	
21 Feb	Wild Arms 3	Ubi Soft	
28 Feb	Pac-Man World 2	Electronic Arts	
28 Feb	Paris Dakar Rally 2	Acclaim	
TBC	Primal	SCEE	
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
7 March	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarding	Activision	
7 March	Tenchu 3: Wrath Of Heaven	Activision	
7 March	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 March	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Devil May Cry 2	Capcom	Wanted!
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
21 March	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi	
21 March	The Mark Of Kri	SCEE	
21 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames	
21 March	Rolling	Rage	
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi	
28 March	NHL 2K3	Infogrames	
TBC	Ape Escape 2	SCEE	
TBC	Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	RTX Red Rock	Activision	
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
APRIL '03			
11 April	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Wanted!
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	
TBC	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	
TBC	RTX Red Rock	Activision	
MAY '03			
TBC	DDRMAX Dance Dance Revolution	Konami	Wanted!
TBC	Dead To Rights	Electronic Arts	
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci	
JUNE '03			
TBC	Dark Chronicle	SCEE	
TBC	Dungeons And Dragons Heroes	Infogrames	
TBC	SOCOM: US Navy SEALs	SCEE	

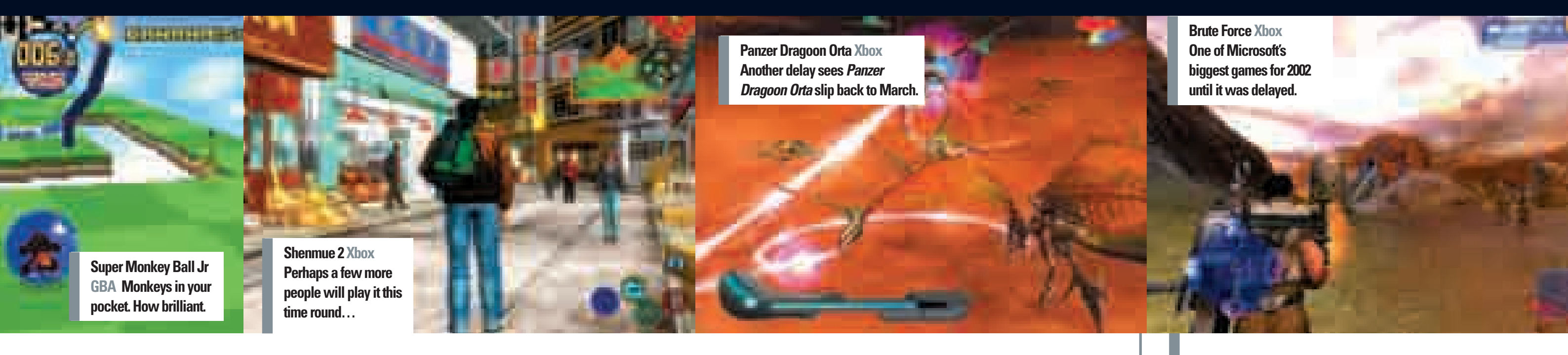
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '03			
21 Feb	Hunter: The Reckoning	Virgin	
21 Feb	The Sum Of All Fears	Ubi Soft	
28 Feb	Pac-Man World 2	Electronic Arts	
28 Feb	Paris Dakar Rally 2	Acclaim	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball 2	Infogrames	Wanted!
MARCH '03			
7 March	Evolution Worlds	Ubi Soft	
7 March	Phantasy Star Online: Episodes I & II	Infogrames	
7 March	Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
7 March	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	Wanted!
7 March	Sonic Mega Collection	Infogrames	
7 March	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 March	Defender	Midway	
14 March	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
14 March	Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	
14 March	Super Bust-A-Move 2: All Stars	Ubi Soft	
14 March	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Haven: Call Of The King	Midway	
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
21 March	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	Wanted!
21 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames	
21 March	Rolling	Rage	
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 March	NHL 2K3	Infogrames	
28 March	World Racing	TDK	
TBC	Powerpuff Girls: Shock Of Ages	Bam!	
APRIL '03			
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	
TBC	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	
MAY '03			
03 May	Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	Wanted!
TBC	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	
JUNE '03			
TBC	Wario World	Nintendo	

XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '03			
21 Feb	The House Of The Dead 3	Infogrames	
28 Feb	Paris Dakar Rally 2	Acclaim	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
7 March	Capcom VS SNK: EO	Capcom	
7 March	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	
7 March	Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
7 March	ToeJam & Earl III	SEGA	Wanted!
7 March	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 March	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
14 March	Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Microsoft	
14 March	Defender	Midway	
14 March	Lamborghini	Rage	
14 March	Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	
14 March	Moto GP Online	THQ	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Haven: Call Of The King	Midway	
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
21 March	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi	
21 March	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	
21 March	Panzer Dragoon Orta	Infogrames	Wanted!

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Super Monkey Ball Jr GBA Monkeys in your pocket. How brilliant.

Shenmue 2 Xbox Perhaps a few more people will play it this time round…

Panzer Dragoon Orta Xbox Another delay sees *Panzer Dragoon Orta* slip back to March.

Brute Force Xbox One of Microsoft's biggest games for 2002 until it was delayed.

21 March	Rolling	Rage	
21 March	Shenmue II	SEGA	
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi	
28 March	Steel Battalion	Capcom	Wanted!
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	NBA 2K3	Infogrames	
TBC	NFL 2K3	Infogrames	
TBC	Toca: Race Driver	Codemasters	Wanted!
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
APRIL '03			
11 April	Kung Fu Chaos	Microsoft	
18 April	Brute Force	Microsoft	
25 April	Teo Feng	Microsoft	
TBC	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	
TBC	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	Wanted!
TBC	V-Rally 3	Infogrames	
MAY '03			
9 May	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	
16 May	Kakuto Chojin	Microsoft	
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci	
JUNE '03			
TBC	Dungeons And Dragons Heroes	Infogrames	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '03			
21 Feb	Command And Conquer Generals	Electronic Arts	
21 Feb	Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	
21 Feb	NASCAR Racing 2003 Season	Vivendi	
21 Feb	Praetorians	Eidos	
21 Feb	Vietcong	Take 2	
28 Feb	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Wanted!
28 Feb	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	
28 Feb	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	
28 Feb	Warrior Kings Battle	Microids	
TBC	Defender	Midway	
TBC	Soldiers Of Anarchy	Big Ben	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
7 March	Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	
7 March	Unreal 2: The Awakening	Infogrames	
14 March	Air Combat Simulation: Lock On	Ubi Soft	
14 March	Lamborghini	Rage	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Highland Warrior	NovaLogic	
28 March	Devastation	NovaLogic	
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi	
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	Star Trek: Elite Force II	Activision	
28 March	Toca: Race Driver	Codemasters	Wanted!
TBC	Port Royale	Big Ben	
APRIL '03			
18 April	Freelancer	Microsoft	
TBC	Blitzkrieg	CDV	
TBC	Gothic II	Jo Wood	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
MAY '03			
02 May	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	
02 May	Heaven And Hell	CDV	

GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '03			
21 Feb	Micro Machines	Infogrames	
28 Feb	Virtua Tennis	Infogrames	
TBC	ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	Acclaim	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanado	
14 March	Bomberman Max Blue	Vivendi	
14 March	Bomberman Max Red	Vivendi	
14 March	Crash Bandicoot 2: N-Tranced	Vivendi	
14 March	Defender	Infogrames	
21 March	Megaman & Bass	Capcom	
21 March	Megaman Battle Network 3	Capcom	
28 March	James Bond 007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	
28 March	The Legend Of Zelda: ALTTP/Four Swords	Nintendo	Wanted!
28 March	The Lost Vikings	Vivendi	
28 March	Super Monkey Ball Jr	Infogrames	
TBC	Phantasy Star Chronicles	SEGA	
TBC	Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Toca World Touring Cars	Ubi Soft	
APRIL '03			
TBC	Altered Beast: Guardian Of The Realms	THQ	
TBC	Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride	SEGA	
TBC	The Revenge Of Shinobi	THQ	
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
TBC	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder	Activision	
TBC	Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	THQ	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh! The Eternal Duelist Soul	Konami	
MAY '03			
TBC	GT Advance 3: Pro Concept Racing	THQ	
TBC	Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Zoo	
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
JUNE '03			
TBC	Rock N' Roll Racing	Vivendi	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, please bear in mind that they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. Blame market forces. Blame the capricious whim of the publishers. But don't blame us, we tried really hard…

games™ ON THE HORIZON

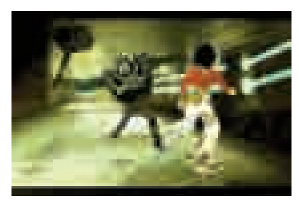
RED DEAD REVOLVER

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
This attracted plenty of attention at E3 last year thanks to its superlative graphics. Now pencilled in for a UK release in November, we're hoping to get more details very soon. Certainly the idea of a shooting game set in the Wild West hasn't been attempted since *Mad Dog McCree*. Let's just hope it's better than that.



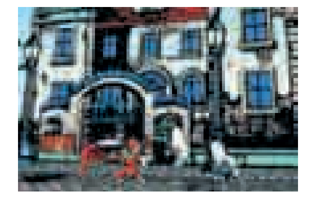
BETWEEN GOOD & EVIL

Format: GameCube, PC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Conceived by the man behind the *Rayman* series, *Between Good And Evil* (formerly known as *Project BG&E*) is a sprawling adventure game set across a whole universe of planets. The clever part is that you can actually fly between them in your spaceship, though it's unclear at this stage exactly how much freedom you'll have.



VIEWTIFUL JOE

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Capcom
We were starting to think that the days of 2D scrolling beat-'em-ups and adventure games were over, and then along came this game. *Viewtiful Joe* uses cel-shading to produce imagery not unlike that of Capcom's own *MegaMan* series, though a number of *Matrix*-inspired special moves give this a style quite unlike anything else.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

YOU LUCKY BLIGHTERS. YOU LUCKY BLOODY BLIGHTERS…



You now have the chance to have your say on game content, design and quality before a game is complete. Years ago (we're talking when pop mistress Sophie Ellis Bextor was but a tabloid-scandal of a *Blue Peter* baby (ask your parents)) when I was a nipper desperate to get a break in the games industry, bashing out a 100-line peek-and-poke program and altering a critical variable was the closest I could come to affecting a game.

These days, we have UGI – User Generated Input. I'm talking about beta-tests, co-operative forums between gamers and developers ahead of a games launch, the ability to create new skins, maps, mods and to share them not only with mates, but with the world at large and even a game's development team.

Game communities made up of players, modifiers and developers are now an active and increasingly essential part of a game's development process. I'm most excited about how this will influence the next big thing – Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Gaming. Codemasters is currently developing its MMORPG *Dragon Empires*, a rich fantasy epic of a game due on PC this winter. UGI is invaluable not only pre-launch but after launch and in play. And when *Dragon Empires* does come out it'll be a game that's controlled and shaped by the players. It's a world where the game design doesn't have an end point because it'll be up to you to decide your online actions – and that will determine the kind of game it'll be as others join in.

Personally, I've got my eye on running one of the empires and hiring other players to do the energetic stuff like fighting, marauding and laying siege to cities for me…

Richard Eddy is Head of Communications at Codemasters, the UK-based developer and global publisher.



THESE ARE TOUGH TIMES FOR MANY DEVELOPERS. CAN THEY WEATHER THE STORM?

Lamborghini (top) is one of the last games to come from Rage's Liverpool studio.



Crawfish were responsible for the GBA version of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (above).

CRASH AND BURN

EVERY SILVER LINING HAS A CLOUD – DAMN

Not long before this issue went to press, news started coming through that Rage – the Liverpool-based development studio responsible for the excellent *Rocky* on PS2, Xbox and GameCube – had closed its doors for good. With its banking facilities cancelled, most staff laid off and the receivers moving in, the whole place looked like it was about to be stripped bare. Of course, that's important news for industry types but nothing exactly earth-shattering for your average gamer; at least, it wouldn't be if it wasn't for the fact this isn't an isolated case and the ground is looking shaky for several important names in the industry.

Considering constant boasts that the games industry has never been doing better (pulling in more cash than most other entertainment media industries combined), the fact that publishers and developers are dropping like flies is increasingly worrying. Between Rage, Runecraft, Crawfish and a number of other smaller foreign developers closing, Infogrames has made massive staff cuts, Acclaim is losing money, bam! Entertainment has scaled back its operations and Virgin Interactive is on the verge of losing its backing from Mr Branson. Things aren't looking as rosy as we might have expected – particularly after the strong Christmas that a lot of companies are claiming to have had.

The question that has to be asked though is what can be done to stop the rot. A quick glance at this month's UK Multiformat Sales Chart suggests that today's gamer likes nothing more than violence, football and licensed games; you know, the stuff that sells by the bucketload but often fails to set the world alight. If that's the kind of thing that makes money these days though, how long will it be before European publishers decide there isn't room for decent original titles and we're awash in a sea of gaming mediocrity?

SPONSOR MONEY

NINTENDO, SONY AND MICROSOFT ANNOUNCE SPONSORSHIP DEALS FOR 2003



01: Microsoft will be working with Robbie Williams on a number of different projects, including the sponsorship of his upcoming European tour ■ 02: Nintendo has already sponsored the Burton European Open and will be sponsoring the MTV Winterjam in March ■ 03: Sony sponsored the ESPN Winter X Games on 30 January, giving spectators the opportunity to try out the latest PS2 games.

The year has only just begun and already the big three console manufacturers are looking at new ways to push their hardware. In what seems like an odd coincidence, Nintendo and Sony have both just sponsored extreme sports events, starting with the Burton European Open on 18 January where a giant GameCube was part of the Night Shoot Out course. Similarly, Sony sponsored the ESPN Winter X Games in Aspen on 30 January, using the event to demonstrate a number of new games and setting up an autograph signing session with world champion snowboarder Shaun White. Nintendo will also sponsor the MTV Winterjam 2003 in March, at which Samus ice statues will gaze down at *Metroid Prime* footage projected onto a giant ice wall.

Not to be outdone, Microsoft has announced that it's one of the main sponsors of Robbie Williams's upcoming European tour, and that it has plans to work with him on numerous other initiatives – and it's set aside plenty of cash to cover the cost of these 'initiatives'.

PIE IN THE SKY

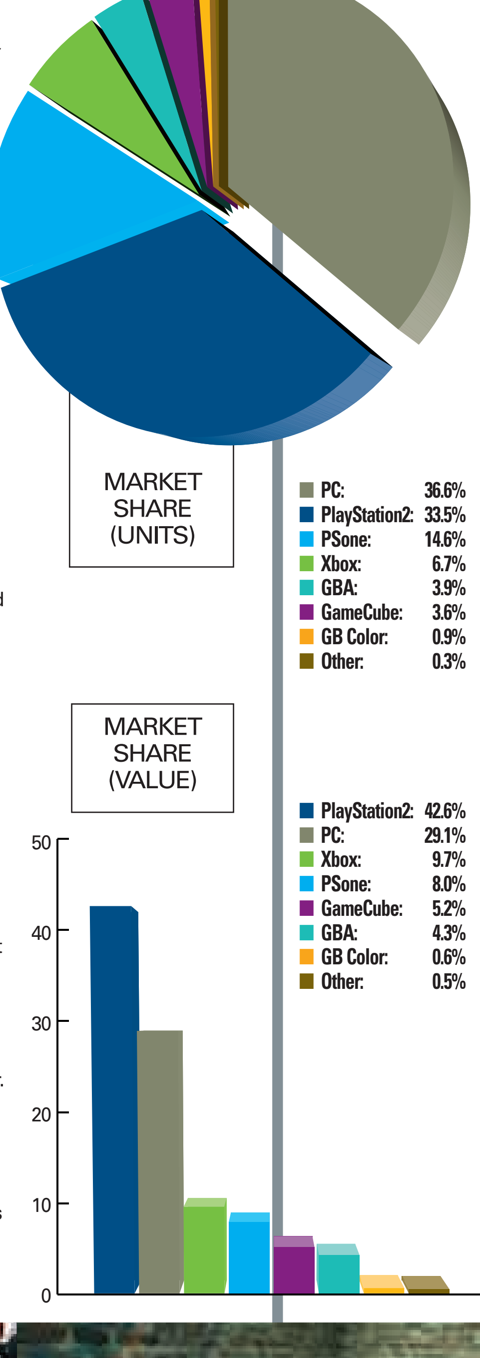
WE'RE ALL NUMBER TWO IN EUROPE

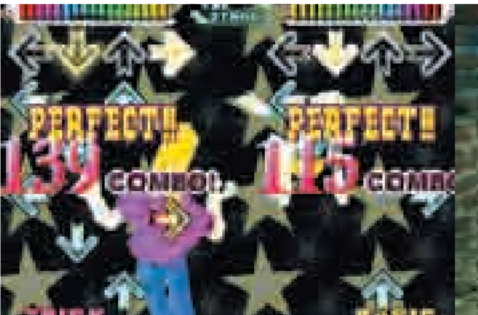
The Pie In The Sky column couldn't be a more fitting place for Nintendo's latest statement: "2002 has been a fantastic year for Nintendo, with Nintendo GameCube coming out of the key Christmas period in the number two position for home consoles across Europe". This announcement surprised everyone, not least Microsoft, which promptly responded: "Xbox launched in Europe less than a year ago and our first Christmas in the region has seen us clearly emerge as the number two player." And the difference between these two statements? Well, very little, apart from the fact that Nintendo forgot to include any figures to back up its claims. In contrast, Microsoft's press release was based on the independent research of ChartTrack and GfK, whose statistics clearly showed that during December Xbox was outselling GameCube 2-to-1.

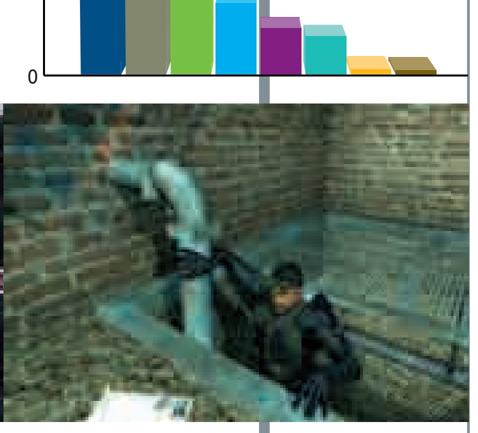
The figures also showed that GameCube actually lost approximately one per cent of its market share over the Christmas period. Of course, Sony was selling almost three times more PS2s than the combined sales of Xbox and GameCube at the time, though overall, the format also lost a little of its market share, slipping 0.8 per cent to 33.5 per cent.

In fact, only PC, Xbox and PSone saw market share increases, with Xbox climbing the most, up 1.2 per cent to an overall share of 6.7 per cent. PSone also saw a sharp increase of one per cent to a market share of 14.6 per cent, though we expect this is a temporary occurrence due to the enormous sales of Konami's *Dancing Stage: Party Edition*.

So if Christmas 2002 is anything to go by, it would appear that Microsoft is finally getting its act together. Apparently, there are now more than eight million Xbox owners worldwide. Of course, it's not fair to judge Nintendo's future prospects on this Christmas alone – certainly in Europe, 2003 looks set to be a much stronger year for software. One thing that does seem certain though is that Sony is set to continue dominating the worldwide console market, having now shipped a massive 50 million hardware units.







UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	GTA: Vice City	Take 2	PS2
2	The Getaway	SCEE	PS2
3	FIFA 2003	EA Sports	PS2, GC, Xbox, PC, PSone, GBA
4	Sim City 4	EA Games	PC
5	James Bond 007: Nightfire	EA Games	PS2, GC, Xbox, PC
6	Harry Potter & The Chamber Of Secrets	EA Games	PS2, GC, Xbox, PC, PSone, GBA
7	Lord Of The Rings: TTT	EA Games	PS2, GBA
8	Dancing Stage: Party Edition	Konami	PSone
9	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	PS2, GC, Xbox, GBA
10	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	EA Games	PS2, GC, Xbox

■ Anyone noticing a bit of a pattern here? Despite there being more than a few decent games made by publishers other than Electronic Arts, the US giant is pretty much dominating the UK Sales Charts at the moment with a mixture of licences and other cross-platform releases. Hey, it's your money – we won't stop you spending it on what you want, but there's more to life than a few EA titles…


GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
THE GETAWAY
FIFA 2003



THE SPOILS OF WAR

Maybe it's the fact that *The Dambusters* is always on TV at Christmas, or because we still remember with great fondness the magical moment when Geoff Hurst put three past the Germans in '66. The British gaming community, particularly PC gamers, seems to be obsessed with World War II.

Whether it's engaging in aerial combat, steering a submarine, breaking out of a prisoner of war camp or planning how to re-fight the war's most significant battles, there have been few sources of inspiration to game developers as fertile as those six years in the mid-20th Century. For Andrew Wafer, Codemasters' games designer who was responsible for the massively popular *Prisoner Of War*, the appeal of WWII is obvious.

"World War II was a period of great hostility and conflict, which gives rise to massive possibilities for dramatic storytelling and playing in heroic roles," he says. "Being one of the first wars where cine cameras and colour photographs were used, we have detailed visual records of the massive scale on which it was fought, the likes of which today's generation of gamers have never witnessed first-hand. We've grown up with our parents or ▷



FOOD RATIONING, DOODLEBUGS, COLDITZ, SPITFIRES, WINSTON CHURCHILL… WHAT IS IT ABOUT WORLD WAR II THAT HAS SUCH A MAGNETIC HOLD ON THE GAMING COMMUNITY? GAMES™ LOOKS AT THE HISTORY OF WWII GAMING AND PICKS OUT SOME OF THE BEST TITLES

THE SPOILS OF WAR

Another Country, Another War

There haven't been many games about the Gulf War but EA released *Desert Strike* (and a sequel *Desert Strike – Return To The Gulf*) almost immediately after the 1991 conflict. SCi's *Conflict: Desert Storm* has been racing up the charts since its release on multiple formats in September. A sequel, *Conflict: Desert Sabre*, is now planned for autumn 2003. Next year SCi are hoping to publish *Conflict: Missing Presumed Dead*, following the exploits of four US Marines behind enemy lines in Vietnam during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Vietnam is the current 'in' war following the recent release of Monte Cristo's *Platoon* and the imminent arrival of Take 2's *Vietcong*. Wargamers with keen memories might remember GTI's 1998 strategy game *Napalm* and HPS Simulations's turn-based *Squad Battles: Vietnam*. Then there's also that rather embarrassing episode for the US in Somalia, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, that should be lifting off sometime this year…

"EARLY STRATEGY GAMES WERE BASED ON THE KIND OF TABLE-TOP WARGAMING FAVOURED BY RETIRED GENERALS"

PLATOON

Monte Cristo's *Platoon* was a 3D real-time strategy game based on the movie of the same name.



Platoon tried to bring home the horror of war by putting you in the shoes of newlywed soldier Martin Lionsdale.

NAM

COMMANDOS 2

Commandos 2 saw you venturing deep into enemy territory to carry out a series of daring missions.

grandparents telling us stories of their heroism, and perhaps now we want some stories of our own."

Wisely, and perhaps typically of games set in this period, painstaking efforts were made to avoid causing offence to those who remember the real events:

"We took special care before the game was released to make sure that its content would not offend, especially as far as real ex-POWs were concerned," Wafer explains. "We also released the game in Germany with no content changes. I'm happy to say that to date we haven't received a single complaint about the game's content."

Prisoner Of War's emphasis on stealth rather than violence may be the reason why it hasn't attracted complaints, but the vast majority of WWII games are a little more 'hands-on'. Flight-sims usually have the greatest attention to detail when it comes to WWII titles and it's hard to be non-violent or objective when you're sitting in a realistic Spitfire taking on a squadron of mean-looking Messerschmitts.

The possibility of experiencing the speed, thrill and danger of dogfights was the reason why air combat was one of the first WWII memories to be seized upon. *Air Warrior* was the first multiplayer online flight combat game and is still very popular. The game spawned *Warbirds* and later *Aces High*, a beautiful 3D sim with 13 aircraft and the ability to commandeer ground vehicles, ships, coastal batteries and anti-aircraft guns. But those online gamers who don't want to spend too much or read a manual the size of a phone book should investigate *Fighter Ace II*.

Reach For The Skies

Enthusiasts should turn to Jane's *WWII Fighters* – it boasts a superb historical 'museum' of old footage and even interviews with real pilots (including two German airmen) – the inclusion of plenty of factual extras serves as a timely reminder that these games are based on real events. The best plane sim is unquestionably *IL-2 Sturmovik* – Ubi Soft's tribute to the war on the Eastern Front. This fearsome 'flying tank' has a variety of missions from strafing enemy columns to U-boat hunting and tank busting, with six extensive campaigns, ground-breaking special effects and a range of flight modes.

Of course it's not just the skies that have been criss-crossed by WWII sims – the oceans have been plundered too. As early as 1994, Dynamix developed a DOS U-boat simulation, *Aces Of The Deep*, with action zones covering the North Atlantic, the African and South American coasts, Europe and part of western USSR – travelling to each war zone took ages but the sense of claustrophobia and tension was striking.

It was soon overshadowed by the definitive sub sim (also released in1995), *Silent Hunter*. The

FIGHTER ACE

DESTROYER COMMAND

series sold over 400,000 copies and the current sequel recreates the Battle of the Atlantic in full 3D splendour. Cleverly, Ubi Soft released *Destroyer Command* at the same time as *Silent Hunter II* and made it possible for the games to interact online – so you could take on U-boats while also fending off Kamikaze suicide planes, pounding enemy beaches or destroying aggressive convoys. It's only when you look back at such creaking older models of naval conflict like SSI's *Great Naval Battles* series (1992-1996) and Interactive Magic's *Harpoon Classic '97* (1996) that you realise how far this genre has progressed.

Down To Earth

The bulk of the gaming community's fascination with WWII is centred on land. The thought of being able to command vast troop and vehicle movements has been far too tempting to resist. In the early days, the emphasis was on turn-based strategy games that had been heavily influenced by the kind of table-top wargaming favoured by retired generals and military recreation nerds. Hasbro's *Axis & Allies* is a good example – set in 1942, you play one of five nations and move your pieces round the map just like the original game. Unfortunately the computer AI was appalling, so your best plan was to play online against a human opponent or, better still, go and buy the board game.

In the same year, however, SSI released the turn-based squad game *Soldiers At War* based on the X-Com model that enabled you to take eight hand-picked men with selected weapons on 15 challenging missions. Two years later, Microprose brought out the natural descendant of *Soldiers At War, Avalon Hill's Squad Leader*. This time there were 30 missions involving British, American or German troops each of whom had separate biogs and ratings and whose abilities and morale were influenced by the outcome of each battle. The option to play as Axis or Allied troops was an acknowledgement that simply blasting 'the Hun' made for a rather one-sided game, and the global nature of WWII was recognised in *Combat Mission* (2000). Set in Western Europe in 1944 and continuing to the conclusion of the war, there are six nationalities

Terrorism: The New Enemy

With the end of the Cold War and the rise of the 'global terrorist' it was only a matter of time before game designers started reflecting the change in new products. Some of this has been tongue-in-cheek, like the foxy and resourceful secret agent Cate Archer in the spoof-Bond series *No One Lives Forever*. Some have been fanciful, like the *IronStorm* conjecture that the First World War was still running in 1964 with modern weaponry. The rest have been more direct like the landmark *Operation Flashpoint*, Tom Clancy's long running *Rainbow Six* series (and various *Ghost Recon*/*Rogue Spear* offshoots) and the masterly *Soldier Of Fortune* that has put balaclavas and snipers back in the spotlight. There are even a few nostalgia reminders of Cold War days, like Eidos's *Project IGI* where the SAS hero goes back to post-Soviet Russia to try and prevent a second Chernobyl disaster.

Perhaps more ominously, JoWood came up with the alarmingly probable *World War III: Black Gold* where NATO and the OPEC countries of the Middle East go to war over the world's dwindling oil reserves. What a relief to know the real world wouldn't use oil as an excuse to go to war…

OH, WHAT A LOVELY WAR!



The subject matter might be serious, but the treatment is positively light-hearted. Games like *Worms, Cannon Fodder* and *Hogs Of War* avoid the harsh realities by by adopting a more comedic approach.

THE SPOILS OF WAR

TEN OF THE BEST

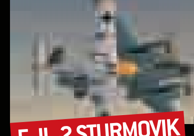
There have certainly been plenty of war games over the last decade, so here's a roll call of the ones we feel deserve an extra-special mention



1. MEDAL OF HONOR
PC, PS, PS2, GC, GBA, Xbox
An FPS that took you down to the battlefield and felt so authentic that you could smell the fear and feel the recoil.

2. BATTLEFIELD 1942
PC, Xbox
A complete wartime experience, enabling you to act as infantryman, pilot, U-boat crewman or tank commander in total online aggression.

3. COMBAT MISSION
PC
The landmark WWII strategy game that brought excellent 3D graphics to turn-based gameplay and married it with real-time action.



4. SILENT HUNTER II
PC
If you want to re-fight the Battle of the Atlantic from the submarine perspective, there's nothing to touch this.



5. IL-2 STURMOVIK
PC
Who'd have thought the neglected Eastern Front would have produced one of the finest flight sims ever created for the PC?

6. AIR WARRIOR III
PC
The mother of all multiplayer online flight combat games – now in its third incarnation and still attracting thousands of fans.

to command and, for once, the genre has 3D graphics to be proud of. What makes the title unique though, is its hybrid turn-based/real-time strategy system that allows you to issue detailed orders to your troops before having to commit yourself to your turn. With a brilliantly simple interface it works like a dream and the scenario generators mean extra longevity.

Two years before *Combat Mission* burst onto the scene, Eidos released the squad-based *RTS Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* which not only had life-like graphics but had thoroughly rounded characters in the six soldier team. A new element had been introduced into wargaming – stealth. Most missions succeeded through cunning rather than firepower. Suddenly you were in a battle where you weren't number-crunching but carefully charting a soldier's actions, interacting with his colleagues and choosing your weapons.

FIGHTER ACE II

Gun Them Down

All that was left was for a full-blooded WWII RTS to appear that would concentrate on amassing troops, and *Sudden Strike* fitted the bill. It veered away from the more realistic approach to go for strength in numbers. There was no elaborate resource management, just mounting up your forces and throwing them at the enemy – all viewed from a top-down perspective.

The final transformation was to move down to the battlefield itself and take on a first- or third-person perspective where you were finally in amongst the action. *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* was the trailblazing FPS that took up the mother of all shooters (*Wolfenstein 3D*), recasting it via the Quake III engine and inventing a quirky story of Nazi experiments in the occult. The game's portrayal of Nazi stormtroopers (along with long-dead Teutonic knights and genetic mutations) was firmly tongue-in-cheek, yet all swastikas will be removed from some European Xbox and PlayStation2 versions. It may seem like history to a lot of today's gamers, but the cultural ramifications of WWII linger on.

> "IT'S JUST COLLATERAL DAMAGE AND PLENTY OF FANCY SPECIAL EFFECTS. IT'S BOYS' OWN FICTION AND WE LOVE IT"

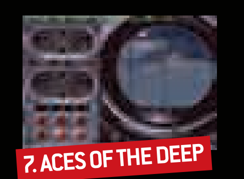
The more historical perspective had to wait until *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* which used the same game engine and first-person perspective but with a much greater emphasis on authenticity, right down to weapon recoil. There were 20 missions spread over several countries, almost entirely linear and involving solo effort. Sound and graphics were top-notch and although stealth was encouraged, brute force was more effective.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

Now the supposed apex has been reached with the latest FPS, *Battlefield 1942* from Digital Illusions. Set in North Africa, the Pacific and East and West Europe, you can change roles rapidly from infantryman to pilot to U-boat crewman or tank commander depending on the scenario – and although there is a single-player mode, this is designed to be a multiplayer warfest involving up to 32 people.

So where do we go from here? UK gamers have to wait with bated breath for Strategy First's total war Internet experience, *WWII Online* – an MMORPG of staggering proportions that not only allows you to command anything on air, sea or land, but also creates personas that you can advance through levels by gaining experience points. Naturally, Strategy First's Marketing Director Al 'Rafter' Corey is upbeat about the game's appeal:

"We have always been seeking to bring the game to a global scale but even our first release of the game which models much of Western Europe at 2:1 scale is so much larger than any other single game world that it set up some tremendous production challenges," he says. "It also created the need for solutions to new problems brought in by combining vehicles that can travel as fast as 300mph together with foot soldiers."



7. ACES OF THE DEEP

DOS
The first game to try to give you a sense of what it was like to sit in a U-Boat waiting for the first depth charge to explode.

8. COMMANDOS 2

PC, PS2, DC, Xbox
Fantastic detail, team-based strategy, stealth, humour and a dog that does tricks – outwitting Nazis was never so much fun.

9. RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

PC, PS2, Xbox
The sequel to the original FPS using the Quake III engine and pitting the hero against occult-meddling Germans – therapeutic.

10. PRISONER OF WAR

PC, PS2, Xbox
A totally ripping yarn in which the chaps help a decent sort of Yank escape from a number of Jerry's top prisons.

The game is already "tremendously popular" in North America and Corey denies that there might be some ethical problems with getting thousands of youngsters to re-fight a relatively recent conflict: "There are no politics or political systems modelled in-game," he explains. "There are no civilians and civilian casualties are not part of the supply or strategic system. We also play an active role, with the help of our community, to ensure a minimum of individual bereavement in the game."

SUDDEN STRIKE

War with the feel-good factor is where it's at and it's perhaps not surprising, therefore, to learn that Codemasters next project is back to the full on, in-your-face combat rather than the stealth-based non-violent approach of *Prisoner Of War*, as Andrew Wafer explains:

"We intend to make the most realistic simulation of WWII ground combat ever, based on historical fact," he says. "For this game we will be using military advisors, historians, period aerial photographs, technical vehicle blueprints and data to make sure we get everything spot-on. The use of advisors and historians for this game is going to be vital as we plan to take the player accurately through the entire war in Europe, recreating the exact terrain, buildings and battle conditions. We think we're approaching a level of realism and detail you'd expect from cinema."

And in the end, that's the appeal. Today's gamers can have little real understanding of WWII that hasn't come from movies like *Saving Private Ryan* or *The Dirty Dozen*. It's about good guys against bad guys, mass troop movements, U-boats and destroyers. No civilian casualties, no 'individual bereavement', just collateral damage and plenty of fancy special effects. It's *Boys' Own* fiction and we love it.

The Future Of War

There should be much rejoicing for WWII game fans in 2003, beginning with CDV's exciting strategy prospect *Panzers*, which will see battles between Germans, Russians and the Allies using over one hundred vehicles.

Earlier in the year, CDV should have *Blitzkrieg* on the shelves – yet another RTS with the same warring factions but with over 200 military vehicles to play with – boy, they like their toys.

***Castle Wolfenstein* addicts will jump at the news that *Wolfenstein – Enemy Territory* will emerge with a new squad-based single-player mode plus lots of new online multiplayer goodies. Be afraid, be very afraid.**

Talking of sequels, can you bear to wait for *Commandos 3* or *Battlefield 1942: The Road To Rome*? And if you enjoyed the adventure game *Prisoner Of War*, then get revving your motorcycle ready for *The Great Escape*…

A WAR TOO FAR…

OPERATION FLASHPOINT



Operation Flashpoint, Medal Of Honor: Frontline and *Conflict: Desert Storm* might well be pushing graphical boundaries by portraying war evermore realistically, but what about taste? Is it too much, too soon?



Yee-haw – ride 'em, cowboy **Sunset Riders Arcade [Konami] 1991**


3UP
INSERT COIN
4UP
INSERT COIN

DEVIL MAY CRY 2

THE HIGH-FLYING DANTE IS BACK. AND GUESS WHAT – HE'S BROUGHT A FRIEND…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 28 March
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Two discs, two heroes and an untold number of evil creatures to do away with. Just another normal day for a half-devil.

If there's one thing we're particularly grateful for in *Devil May Cry 2*, it's the lack of pointless slow-motion effects. *Max Payne* has a lot to answer for – its at-the-time unique and impressive slowdown was beautiful to behold but, alas, there was an evil side to it and Bullet Time quickly became the new cool as every game had to have it. Now it seems that wherever we look, we happen upon gratuitous use of said effect and no genre is safe – already tainting beat-'em-ups, sports games, adventures and shooters, the rampaging slow-motion demon shows no sign of remorse. To this end, we must extend our thanks to Capcom for not caving in under pressure and including gaming's current big gimmick – this title is certainly no worse for being played out at a constant speed.

But we digress. The inevitable return of Dante is upon us and as we expected there are more new moves, weapons, enemies and locations than we could possibly hope to keep track of. The most notable improvement is the inclusion of a second playable character in Lucia, a female half-devil (with an impressive angelic Devil Trigger state) whose very existence doubles the length of the game. You see, *Devil May Cry 2* will come on two discs – one for each character (see Twice As Nice, below) – which will increase longevity no end. In terms of actual gameplay, picture the best moments of the first game mixed with elements of *Max Payne* and the finest action scenes Hollywood can stage and you're getting close – this is something very special indeed.

Dante and Lucia share basic moves, many of which will be familiar to those who know the first game, but new inclusions such as double-jumps as standard, wall-running and improved gunmanship serve only to make the action even more frantic. If you thought the PS2 would be hard-pressed to topple the visuals and effects of the previous game then you're in for a treat; Dante's second outing is pushing the machine further and while it may not be streets ahead of its peers, *Devil May Cry 2* is very pretty indeed. The silky smooth animation is absolutely beautiful as Dante and Lucia dance around their victims before doing away with them in their trademark stylish manner. Even the sound is up there with the best the system has to offer, and while we've only been able to sample the first few missions as each character, we didn't want to be separated from the game.

All fans of the first game should be eagerly awaiting the return of Dante. Quite how Capcom have managed to make the action smoother and faster, the areas larger and the whole experience more epic is beyond us, but they've done it and must be wholeheartedly congratulated. We'll reserve final judgment until we get our hands on both completed discs (we can't wait), but it looks as though Capcom should be onto another winner. The only area where the game faltered slightly was the camera – the fixed views are occasionally tricky but it's rare for a 3D game to escape without a single camera issue. In short, going by what we've seen we should be able to leave the crying to the devils…

TWICE AS NICE

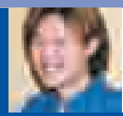
Early rumours that *Devil May Cry 2* would come on two discs can now be confirmed – there'll be a disc for Dante's game and a separate one for Lucia's adventure. Like *Resident Evil 2*'s dual disc system, players can attempt the scenarios in whichever order they choose but will need to complete both discs to see the whole picture. Many of the major cut-scenes are the same in both adventures, although each has unique movies that go into more detail on certain aspects dependant on which character you play as. Wonderfully, the system works even better here than it did in *Resident Evil 2* as there's to be a lot less repetition between the two adventures. Sure, you'll revisit areas as each of the characters but there's a lot more variety than in similar titles.

> "DANTE AND LUCIA DANCE AROUND THEIR VICTIMS BEFORE DOING AWAY WITH THEM IN THEIR TRADEMARK STYLISH MANNER"



■ Most of the wildlife is unfriendly but Dante's not the kind of guy to let an overgrown sparrow get the best of him.

■ Following a double-jump, Dante can cut straight into a diving attack with both guns blazing. Glorious.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Noritaka Funamizu is General Manager of Capcom's Production Studio 1 and has recently worked on *Auto Modellista* and *Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure* as well as the second coming of Dante. Interestingly, he was also on the team behind the original *Street Fighter II* – quite a claim to fame in anyone's books

HISTORY

- **GIO GIO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE** 2003 [PS2]
- **AUTO MODELLISTA** 2002 [PlayStation2]
- **STREET FIGHTER II** 1991 [Arcade]

Who needs a sword when you have feet? Lucia makes with some fancy footwork.

Instead of purchasing special abilities, this time you'll need to discover Amulet pieces to earn them.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DOUBLE DEVIL DESTRUCTION DECIPHERED

DEVIL MAY CRY + MAX PAYNE x MYTHICAL CREATURES = DEVIL MAY CRY 2

An early boss is capable of a rather powerful attack involving throwing you at the wall – very friendly.

"MUCH OF THE GAME ENVIRONMENT IS NOW OUTDOORS AND INCLUDES A GOTHAM-LIKE CITYSCAPE AND AN OLD EUROPEAN TOWN"

CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GUNS, NAZIS AND ZOMBIES

WOLFENSTEIN 3D + RESIDENT EVIL x NEW TECHNOLOGY = RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

"WITH THE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY OF XBOX, CONSOLE GAMERS WILL BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THE HEART-STOPPING ACTION OF RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN"

LARRY GOLDBERG, ACTIVISION

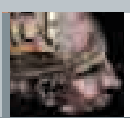


PS2: Although there are better looking first-person shooters on PS2, the character models are fairly realistic.

Xbox: The levels feature a perfect blend of corridors, underground bunkers and wide-open battlegrounds.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

XBOX / MULTIFORMAT



COMPANY PROFILE

■ id Software was formed in 1991 and has been responsible for many of the best-known first-person shooters since that time. The company has also spent a lot of time developing new graphics engines for use by other games companies, as well as being at the forefront of online gaming.

HISTORY

- QUAKE 1996 [PC]
- DOOM 1993 [PC]
- WOLFENSTEIN 3D 1991 [PC]

STEP INTO THE SHOES OF AN ARMY RANGER AND PUT AN END TO THE NAZIS' EVIL PLANS. AGAIN.

There was a ten year gap between the release of the original *Wolfenstein 3D* and the PC release of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* in 2001. A gap that saw the power of technology advance so far that the 2D cut-out sprites used in the original game could be replaced by real-time, 3D, geometric character models. The new use of polygons may not need an introduction, but the changes to both the structure and story of the latest instalment in the *Wolfenstein* series certainly do.

You see, while the original game took a (mostly) realistic approach to war and the assassination of Hitler, *RTCW* includes a hefty amount of supernatural references based around Hitler's fascination with the occult. This has given the developers an excuse to include zombies and mutants (created by Heinrich Himmler), alongside all the Nazis any *Wolfenstein* fan could hope for. This variation carries the action from the heights of castle turrets down to underground crypts and laboratories.

Over a year has passed since *RTCW* came out on PC and now the game is finally making the predictable move to console. Unfortunately, differences between the architecture of the three formats have meant that a few changes have had to be made to both console versions. This is a particular problem where PS2 is concerned – the usual memory deficiency problems have meant that a number of features have had to be removed completely.

Subtitled *Operation Resurrection*, PS2 *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is purely a single player affair – the lack of memory and processor power being the main reasons behind this. Even the one player mode (which is fairly impressive compared to many other PS2 first-person shooters) has been cut down from the PC original. Edges look typically flickery and jagged, and the action regularly becomes choppy as the frame rate tries to stay locked at 60. Of course, there's still a considerable amount of time for such imperfections to be ironed out and, as compensation for these cutbacks, an exclusive mission prior to the first stage has been added.

Thankfully, *Wolfenstein* on Xbox offers a much more comprehensive package – possibly because of the parallels between the internal architecture of Xbox and a PC. The visuals are far more solid than the PS2 version and an impressive selection of multiplayer options are being included, as well as a virtually flawless translation of the single player game. Co-operative and death match modes are already in place, as well as eight-player system-link and Xbox Live support, leaving plenty of room for replay once you've completed the main game. Subtitled *Tides Of War*, the game is planned for release shortly after Xbox Live in March and looks set to be one of many reasons to subscribe to Microsoft's online gaming service.

When all's said and done though, neither *Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection* on PS2 or *Wolfenstein: Tides Of War* on Xbox offer anything particularly new to the FPS genre. Even so, the design and structure of the levels deserves to be praised, as there seems to be the perfect blend of exploration, shooting and puzzles. There are still a few months of development time remaining before either version of the game is released. We look forward to seeing how much better the finished titles will be.

DETAILS

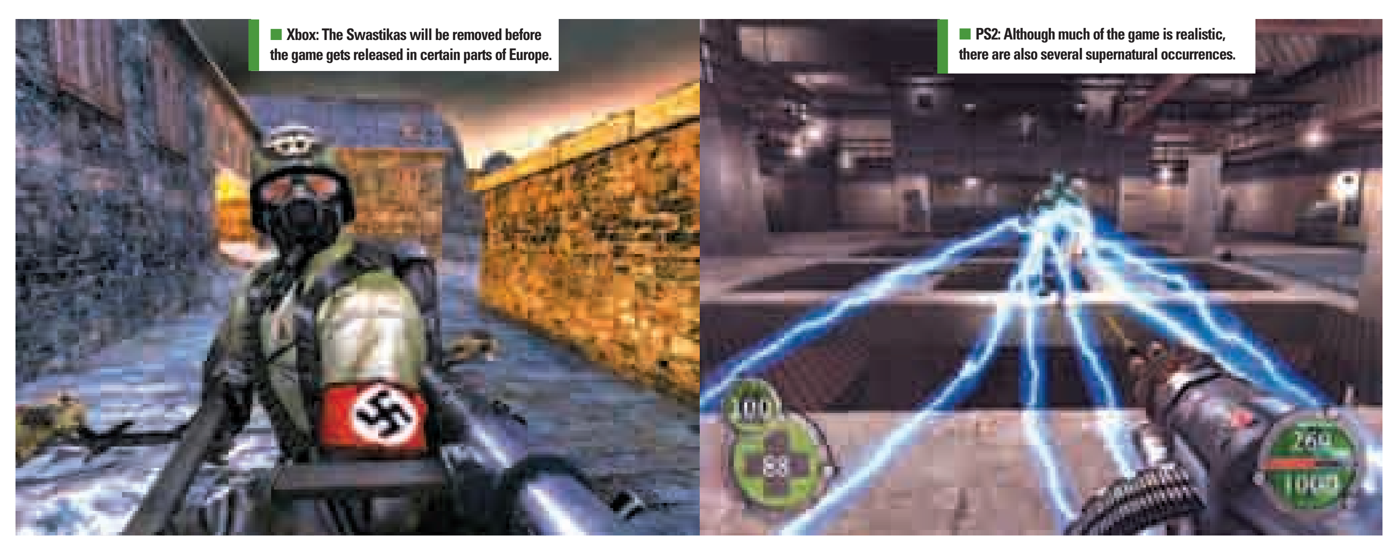
FORMAT: Xbox/PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: id/Nerve/Raster Productions
RELEASE: 2003 TBC (Japan: TBA/US: 2003 TBC)
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16 (Xbox), 1 (PS2)

■ With plenty of atmosphere, this should please PS2 and Xbox gamers.

> "THERE SEEMS TO BE THE PERFECT BLEND OF EXPLORATION, SHOOTING AND PUZZLES"

THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

The Xbox and PS2 versions of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* differ slightly – the Xbox game sticks closely to the PC original, while the PS2 version omits the multiplayer mode, instead featuring an exclusive new level. This is based in Egypt and sees the characters travelling to Castle Wolfenstein as a prelude to the main game. There will also be many new secret items and special bonuses. By contrast, the Xbox version will have a much greater emphasis on multiplayer and will feature Xbox Live compatibility for up to 16 players and a split-screen co-operative mode. It will also support Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound and a whole host of new monsters and weapons.



■ Xbox: The Swastikas will be removed before the game gets released in certain parts of Europe.

■ PS2: Although much of the game is realistic, there are also several supernatural occurrences.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

RAINBOW SIX IS BACK AND IT LOOKS SET TO APPEAL TO A WIDER AUDIENCE THAN BEFORE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox, GameCube, PS2
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March TBC (Japan: TBA/ US: March TBC)
GENRE: Strategy/FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

■ Whether it's realistic squad dynamics or top-class first-person shooting you're after, *Raven Shield* shouldn't disappoint. It's got the guns, graphics, AI and interface to make this the best *Rainbow Six* game in the series.

Until the release of *Splinter Cell* last year, Ubi Soft's Montreal studio was still relatively unknown, despite having produced some of the company's most successful titles. Well, if the quality of *Splinter Cell* is an accurate representation of what the division is capable of (8/10, **games**™ issue 1), then *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Raven Shield* should be one of this year's must-have PC and console titles, as it's being developed by the same studio. This is the first *Rainbow Six* game to be produced in-house at Ubi Soft – the others were made by Red Storm Entertainment. Despite the change of team though, Ubi Soft has assured the fans that it's working closely with Red Storm to assure absolute authenticity to the series.

Indeed, there's no real reason for Ubi Soft to make many, if any, major changes – the series has been incredibly successful since the release of the first game in 1998; so far more than 6.7 million *Rainbow Six* games have been sold worldwide. And it's not difficult to see why – rarely do games take such an in-depth and atmospheric approach to their subject matter.

However, despite the authenticity and atmosphere of the games, some players felt that they were simply too frustrating, long-winded and unrewarding. It was possible to spend hours gearing-up your soldiers, planning your route through the level and tweaking your stats, only to watch the entire team get massacred within a few minutes of beginning the mission. Thankfully, while the front end has been retained (and made much more user-friendly), it's now possible to approach the game in several ways. If you enjoyed the originals you can play this in almost exactly the same manner – carefully choosing the most suitable weapons and equipment for each mission and so on. Alternatively, you can choose to voice a basic set of commands to your soldiers in-game, cutting out the need for seemingly endless preparation and stat-browsing. You can even enjoy *Raven Shield* as a fairly standard FPS, making the 15 levels on offer more appealing to a wider audience.

The game uses the wonderfully versatile Unreal graphics engine so the visuals are looking very lovely indeed; both the scenery and the soldiers have been constructed from enough polygons to make them appear solid and true-to-life. Every available gun can now be seen on-screen during play, as can every piece of equipment with which you arm your soldiers. Animation is top-notch too, featuring ragdoll technology to make enemies behave naturally in their surroundings, so if you shoot a bad guy he'll fall down stairs and bang against nearby scenery before ending up in a randomly generated, crumpled mess on the floor. There's even the inclusion of realistic weather and lighting effects, which all add up to make this one of the most visually polished games we've seen in some time.

"ONE OF THE MOST VISUALLY POLISHED GAMES WE'VE SEEN IN SOME TIME"

Although the Tom Clancy games aren't to everyone's taste, the developers are cleverly building on the strong base they already have to create one of the most in-depth and enjoyable strategy-cum-FPS games on the market. Watch out for the full review of the finished product very soon.

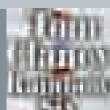
BOMBS AWAY

One of the most impressive parts of *Raven Shield* is the number of grenades on offer and how these are represented visually. Thanks to an incredibly user-friendly control interface, it's easy to get your soldiers to hang back and wait for a door-destroying explosion, then move in and take out any foes that may be lurking inside. You can also use grenades to gas the enemy. And if you happen to come into contact with the gas yourself during these attacks, you'd better be prepared for a very lovely motion-blur effect that distorts your view. Better still are the flash grenades, which sting your eyes and leave a ringing sound in your ears. These can be avoided simply by looking away, but if you happen to be facing one whilst wearing a pair of night-vision goggles you're not going to be seeing properly for a good few seconds.



■ There are lots of commands to learn but the interface is very user-friendly.

■ Thanks to the versatile Unreal engine everything looks big, bold and detailed.



AUTHOR PROFILE

Tom Clancy was born on 12 April 1947 at Franklin Square Hospital, Baltimore. He attended Loyola High School and College (also in Baltimore), before going on to become a best-selling novelist. Many of his books have been made into movies and, more recently, a range of popular computer and videogames

HISTORY

- THE SUM OF ALL FEARS 1991
- PATRIOT GAMES 1987
- THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER 1984

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A BIT OF FPS, A BIT OF STRATEGY, A LOT OF FUN

RAINBOW SIX + UNREAL + HALO = RAVEN SHIELD

"WE KNOW OUR FANS CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER TO PLAY THIS NEXT CHAPTER OF THE BLOCKBUSTER SERIES"

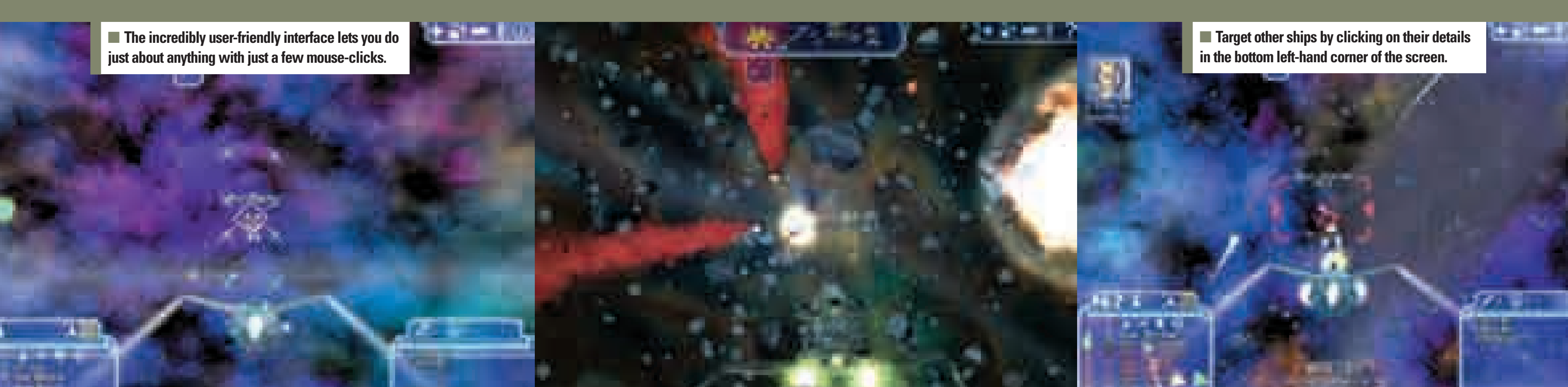
CHADI LEBBOS, UBI SOFT

You can now choose to control your soldiers with in-game voice commands rather than pre-game stat-tweaking.

You'll need a combination of sharp-shooting, stealth and cunning if you're to succeed.

As well as handing out messy deaths, grenades can be used to blow doors open. Certain grenades also have more 'specialist' results.

FREELANCER


The incredibly user-friendly interface lets you do just about anything with just a few mouse-clicks.

Target other ships by clicking on their details in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen.

BUYING, SELLING, SHOOTING ROGUE SPACECRAFT… ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR A FREELANCER

In a world where so many game sequels fail to do much more than their predecessors, it's always nice when someone breaks the mould and actually takes things a few steps further to create a far superior title – even if the original was brilliant to begin with. Take *Freelancer*, for instance; despite being made by the same developer and having a similar-sounding name to *StarLancer* – a damn fine space-based blasting flight sim that appeared on the PC and Dreamcast – *Freelancer* is so much more. Yes, one of the main parts of the game involves flying around in a spaceship while shooting at other spaceships, but rather than being able to do little else – as was the case in *StarLancer* – this is just the tip of the iceberg for Digital Anvil's latest effort.

As the star of *Freelancer*, you are Edison Trent (or just Trent to his friends, enemies and, er, everyone else), a suitably gruff and mysterious chap who manages to survive a brutal attack on an orbiting space station shortly after the game begins. Having landed on a nearby planet with only the shirt on your back, it's up to you to build yourself up again from scratch. Of course, how you go about your business after the first few basic missions (which act as both a tutorial and a way of getting yourself going in terms of cash and a ship) is entirely up to you.

Fancy playing the hero? Then you can continue to accept missions from the Liberty Security Forces, along with other 'good' factions, in a battle against a criminal sect known as The Order. Those who prefer something a bit more neutral might fancy becoming a commodities trader, playing the markets as they rise and fall, while the more opportunistic may prefer to dive into the underbelly of society and become an all-out space pirate, accepting raiding missions from local space outlaws and blasting cargo ships out of the trade lanes in order to loot and pillage. It's a pretty open concept and with 48 different galactic systems on offer, there's more than enough scope for exploration and adventure here.

Having played a fair way into the preview code of *Freelancer*, we can honestly say that we're impressed – while possibly not the all-encompassing *Elite*-beater that some people might be hoping for, *Freelancer* looks like it offers a more than healthy combination of shoot-'em-up action and adventure elements. If all goes well and the game actually hits its release date in April, we might just have one of the PC games of the year on our hands…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Digital Anvil
RELEASE: April '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: TBC

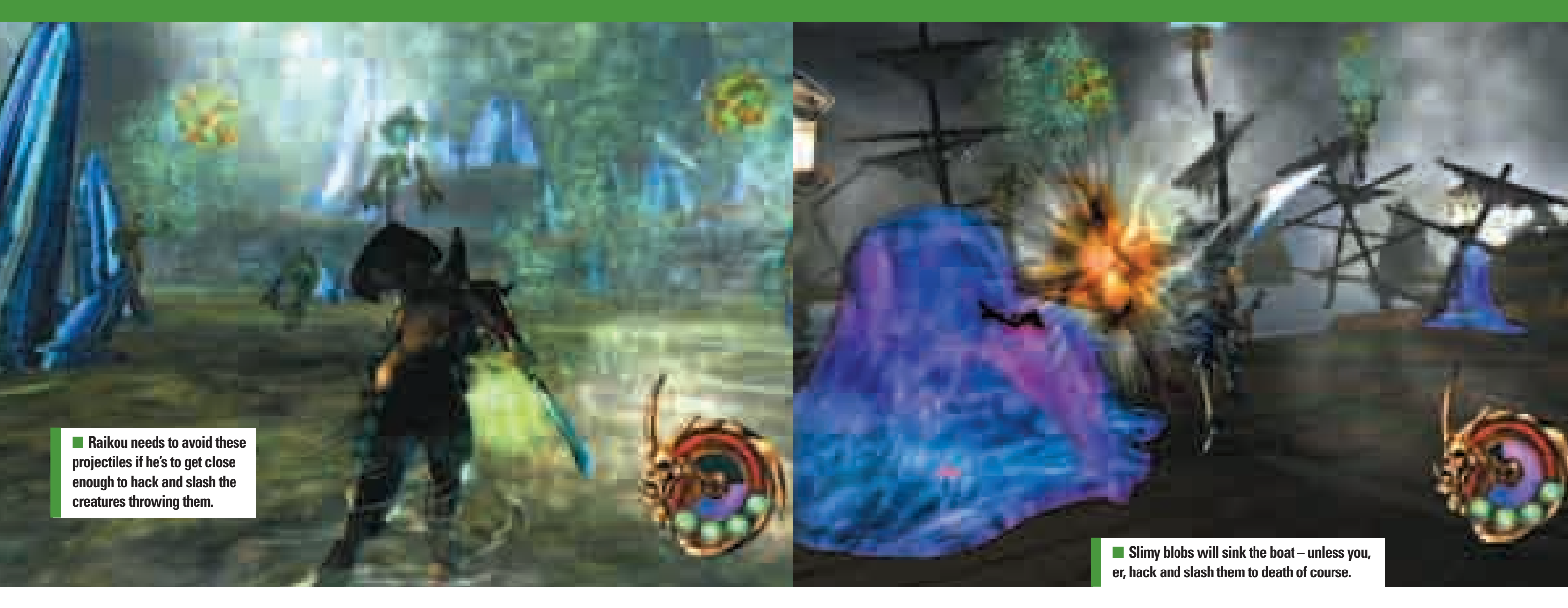
Elite meets *StarLancer* – a fantastic combination of spaceship-blasting, flight action, trading and choosing your own destiny.

"FROM WHAT WE'VE PLAYED OF FREELANCER SO FAR, WE HAVE TO ASK THE QUESTION – WHY HASN'T ANYONE COME UP WITH THIS SOONER?"


Once you've landed on a planet you'll be able to upgrade your ship, buy commodities or even look for a new job.


eMag

OTOGI



Raikou needs to avoid these projectiles if he's to get close enough to hack and slash the creatures throwing them.

Slimy blobs will sink the boat – unless you, er, hack and slash them to death of course.

SAMURAI WARRIORS ARE ALWAYS COOL – ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY CAN FLY

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: From Software
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now/ US: TBA)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

Hacking and slashing is what it's all about. But the 3D camera movement makes it a frustrating experience.

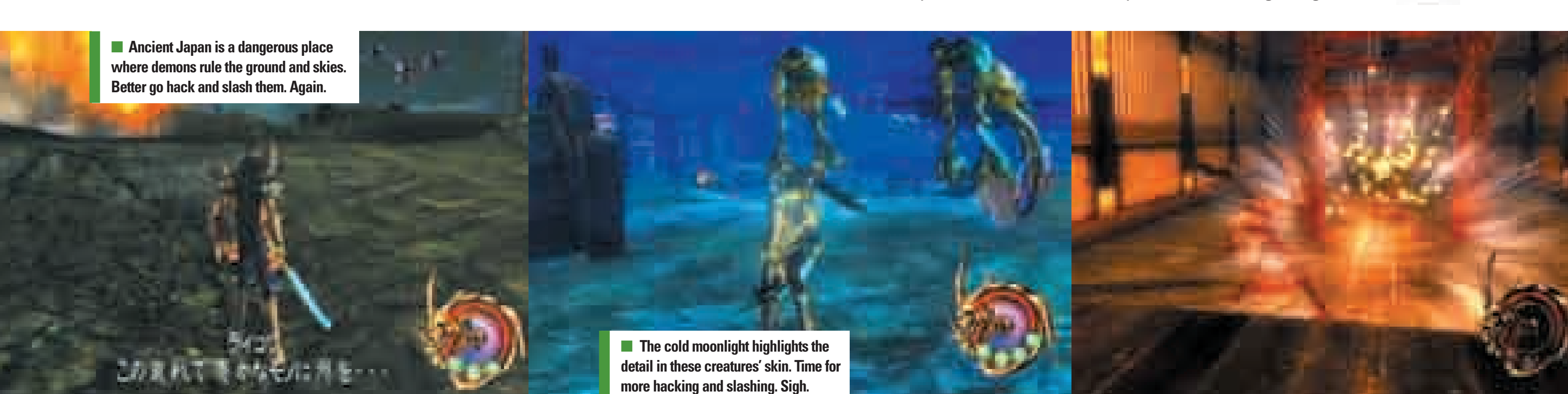
The Xbox isn't performing particularly well in Japan – everyone knows that. Aside from its overseas origin and the bulkiness of the unit itself, many blame the lack of Japanese software for this apparent loathing. However, while a few Japanese developers are still snubbing the console, others are gradually starting to appreciate the additional features it has over PS2.

After successfully distributing *Murakumo* (a popular Japanese mech fighting game) last year, From Software is extending its relationship with Microsoft by delivering its second Xbox-exclusive title, *Otogi*. In case you haven't heard of it (very likely if you don't live in Japan), *Otogi* is a fantasy-based samurai slash-'em-up with a heavy emphasis on weapons, magic and upgrading your character. In fact, the game has been referred to as an action RPG, though the lack of exploration, towns and villages, and the fact that progression is broken up into separate missions, suggests otherwise.

"A SAMURAI SLASH-'EM-UP WITH THE EMPHASIS ON WEAPONS, MAGIC AND CHARACTER"

But while the game doesn't seem to have the RPG element that had been expected, it's enjoyable to play, despite a few flaws. In the Japanese version that we tested, missions tended to be a simple case of locating specified items or creatures and destroying them with a combination of moves. Raikou (the main character) has the ability to jump high into the air and perform airborne combos with an unprecedented level of elegance. This is helped no end by crisply textured environments, clever use of special effects and a competent orchestral soundtrack.

However, the game currently features some of the worse 3D camera movement we've ever encountered. The L-trigger is used to lock-on to the nearest enemy, though it regularly focuses on enemies that are off-screen. This is particularly problematic when many foes attack simultaneously, as what you're fighting, what you're locked-on to and which way the camera is pointing simply don't correspond. Of course, this is the Japanese version and these niggles may have been fixed when it arrives here. And let's hope so, because although it's never going to be a reason to buy an Xbox, *Otogi* has the potential to be a great game.



Ancient Japan is a dangerous place where demons rule the ground and skies. Better go hack and slash them. Again.

The cold moonlight highlights the detail in these creatures' skin. Time for more hacking and slashing. Sigh.


eMag

TENCHU 3: WRATH OF HEAVEN



"TENCHU 3'S UNIQUE NINJA-STYLE GAMEPLAY DELIVERS AN EXPERIENCE THAT'S UNLIKE ANY OTHER CONSOLE GAME"
LARRY GOLDBERG, ACTIVISION

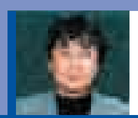
■ K2 has managed to implement some very nice visual effects, including the heat haze that blurs the scenery.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
HOW TO MAKE A NINJA STAR

SHINOBI + METAL GEAR SOLID x A LITTLE MAGIC = TENCHU 3

■ Things have come a long way since the crude imagery seen in the original *Tenchu* on PSone.

TENCHU 3: WRATH OF HEAVEN
PLAYSTATION2



COMPOSER PROFILE
■ Born in Tokyo, composer Noriyuki Asakura began his musical career in 1982 by composing theme tunes for television and went on to write the soundtrack for the popular Japanese animation series *Rurouni Kenshin*. Asakura-san made his videogame debut in 1994 when he produced the soundtrack for Sony's *Crime Crackers*.

HISTORY
■ **TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS** 1998 [PSone]
■ **RUROUNI KENSHIN** 1996 [PSone]
■ **CRIME CRACKERS** 1994 [PSone]

THE POPULAR PLAYSTATION STEALTH-'EM-UP RETURNS AND IT'S LOOKING BETTER THAN EVER

PS2 **It's a little strange that ninjas, known for being agile assassins who can appear as if from nowhere, make the kill and then disappear, are nearly always depicted in videogames as masked heroes who gallantly save the day.** When *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* was released on PSone in 1998 it was one of the only games to emphasise the stealthy side of ninja activity. And though many confrontations resulted in typical hack and slash combat, it was actually possible to sneak up behind enemies and dispose of them with a quick slice across the throat if you were particularly vigilant.

Tenchu 3 doesn't really stray too far from that successful formula; apart from a few new combos and weapons, the core gameplay remains virtually unchanged. This is somewhat surprising as this instalment in the series is actually being developed by a completely different company to the first two games. While some of the imagery was a little crude on Sony's original hardware, the gameplay (though a little slow and clunky in places) was always solid. As well as being slightly faster than the first two games, the extra processing power of the PS2 has also allowed for hugely improved visuals. K2 has managed to maintain a high frame rate, providing for responsive gameplay and incredibly smooth animation as well as taking the draw distance much further back. In the PSone games, much of the scenery was faded through fog or darkness just a few metres ahead of the character, while here you can see much further towards the horizon. Because of this, you can plan your route through each level much more strategically than before. On top of this, characters are constructed from a far greater number of polygons and the levels are, on the whole, many times larger.

Set in the late 1570s, *Tenchu 3* focuses on a mysterious ninja called Tenrai and his attempts to conquer Japan with his hordes of minions. As before, the player has a choice of two stealth assassins – Rikimaru and Ayame – who are out to save the country from the powers of evil. Predictably, Rikimaru (male) is the stronger and slower of the two characters, while Ayame (female) tends to be more nimble but less powerful. Each comes equipped with their own basic weapon and, unlike many other games, new blades and spears can be obtained whenever an enemy is defeated. These are then added to your inventory and can be selected before each level. There's also the option to play as bad guy Tesshu himself once you've completed the main game, adding replay value to what already looks to be a great package. Although his journey though the game is slightly shorter than the main adventure (spanning just six levels, rather than the usual nine), all the cut-scenes have been adjusted to give the player a different view of the storyline.

With *Shinobi* sticking closely to its arcade roots and *Ninja Gaiden* looking set to do the same, *Tenchu 3* takes a much more subtle and atmospheric approach. And although the *Tenchu* brand isn't as well-known as some, this should be the definitive PS2 ninja game.

"ALTHOUGH THE BRAND ISN'T AS WELL-KNOWN AS SOME, TENCHU 3 SHOULD BE THE DEFINITIVE PS2 NINJA GAME"

DETAILS
FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: K2
RELEASE: 7 March (Japan: TBC/ US: 7 March)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ Creep silently across rooftops, sneak around corners and destroy enemies without being detected. And if they see you? Kill 'em.

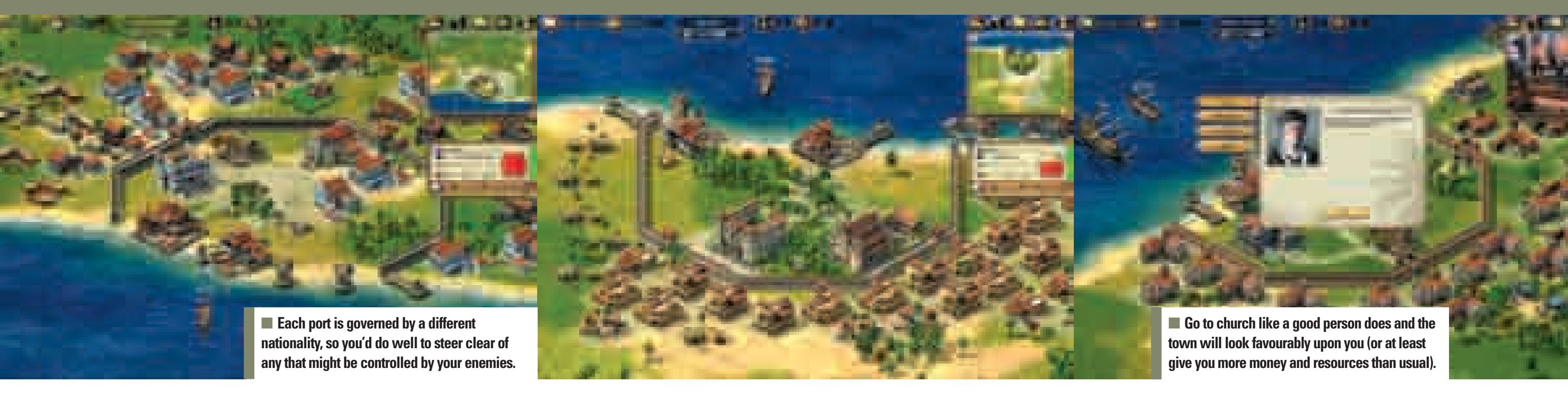
TENCHU FOR TWO
While the *Tenchu* series has always portrayed the life of a ninja as accurately as a videogame can, the experience was always a lonely one to be enjoyed by a single player. For this instalment in the series, developer K2 has introduced a decent two-player mode which can be played in two very different ways. The first is the Versus mode in which players face each other in typically stealthy *Tenchu* fashion. But we're much more interested in the Co-operative Team mode in which players must work together to complete specified missions. Sadly, the regular single-player levels aren't selectable here – displaying double the amount of detail simply wasn't viable on the PS2 hardware. Instead, the company has constructed five multiplayer-exclusive levels in which both the Versus and Co-operative games are played.



■ As well as sneaking around you'll need to take part in some full-on combat.

■ Ayame creeps along a wall, unnoticed by the enemies beyond. It's actually possible to get though such situations without being spotted.

PORT ROYALE



■ Each port is governed by a different nationality, so you'd do well to steer clear of any that might be controlled by your enemies.

■ Go to church like a good person does and the town will look favourably upon you (or at least give you more money and resources than usual).

FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD PC – YO-HO-HO AND AN RTS GAME

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Ascaron
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '03
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8

■ Sail the high seas in search of gold, jewels and a nice place to put your boots up in this swashbuckling RTS adventure.

> "IF YOU'RE OFTEN TURNED OFF BY RTS GAMES, PORT ROYALE MIGHT JUST BE THE ONE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND ONCE AND FOR ALL"

Swashing buckles, burying treasure and saying 'arrrrr' a lot – yes, if there's one thing that we've always fancied trying our hands at, it's being a pirate. Of course, it's not very likely that we'll be able to get away with the whole 'wooden leg and eye patch' look these days (it's so passé). And while sailing the seven seas is all very well we doubt we'd ever get out of Southampton docks without a permit. Still, at least we've got our games covered – with *Skies Of Arcadia Legend* on the GameCube taking care of the slightly unrealistic adventure side, we must look to the PC for something more authentic.

Covering the late 16th and early 17th Centuries and set in the heart of the Caribbean, *Port Royale* gives you the chance to go from being a lone sailor with aspirations of greatness to governing your own island. Of course, it's not an overnight transformation and you'll have to do a fair amount of trading, building and seaborne fighting before you'll ever make it into the big leagues. Everything you decide – your nationality (English, Spanish, French or Dutch), your moral status (a basic trader or a rogue), the missions you choose to accept, whether you decide to marry the governor's daughter – can affect your standing in society and, ultimately, your progress in the game.

If you're looking for a comparison, think of the classic space trading sim *Elite* mixed with *Sim City* then tossed out onto the ocean waves with some swarthy pirates thrown in for good measure. While the aim of the game is to ultimately govern your own island, the experience lasts as long as you choose to prolong it – by declining an offer of governorship you can simply find another island and start afresh.

Having spent a fair amount of time with the practically complete preview code, we can honestly say that *Port Royale* is something of a surprise. For a game that's come relatively out of nowhere, the delicate balance of trading, battling and all-round piracy is struck pretty darn well. Being an RTS, it certainly won't appeal to the 'shoot first, forget about the questions' generation of new PC gamers, but with a bit of luck *Port Royale* will draw enough attention from RTS fans to do as well as it deserves when it hits the streets next month.



■ As your port grows, you can mount external defences to ward off attack. There's nothing quite like the smell of gunpowder in the morning…


eMag

SEGA RALLY



Starting off on the familiar Desert course is a great way to get used to the new handling.

HAS THE FIRST REAL CHALLENGER TO MARIO'S HANDHELD RACING CROWN ARRIVED AT LAST?

It's amazing how many gamers jump for joy whenever an old game reappears on a new platform. Rather than digging out older versions on forgotten systems, countless people shell out all over again for the 'new' version. The Game Boy Advance has been inundated with such ports, but only a few have actually stood the test of time. Some have had new features added – like *Zelda*'s fantastic *Four Swords* quests – and SEGA's 'new' handheld racer is the next of these to grace our pocket consoles. While some tracks and vehicles return for repeat performances, a lot of the game's features are either re-jigged or brand new, which will be great news for racing fans everywhere. *SEGA Rally* is back.

Four cars and four tracks are initially available, with more unlockable in the Shop as the game progresses. Coins are earned for placing highly in the various competitions and are used to buy the extra vehicles, courses and pieces of artwork that become available to purchase as your skill increases. It's not only the levels that will be familiar to older players though – the little GBA speaker pumps out some familiar tunes, over which course directions (and some random comments about your driving) are spoken.

There can be no denying that *SEGA Rally* looks and sounds the part – with the exception of a little pop-up, the races run very smoothly and although car handling can feel slightly tricky at first, you'll soon find yourself powersliding with the best of them. Best of all, get a handheld-owning friend round and there's the option to go head to head via a link cable or share ghost data for Time Trial mode; you'll be able to download their times to see how good they are before you embarrass yourself with a pitiful defeat.

SEGA Rally could be just what the GBA needs. With the imminent launch of the more 'trendy' GBA: SP, potential buyers are more likely to be enticed when they see established products like *SEGA Rally* alongside *Sonic* and *Mario* on the shelves. This smaller version looks set to continue the heralded series in style, too – it seems to do almost everything as well as we could ever have expected within the constraints of the technology.

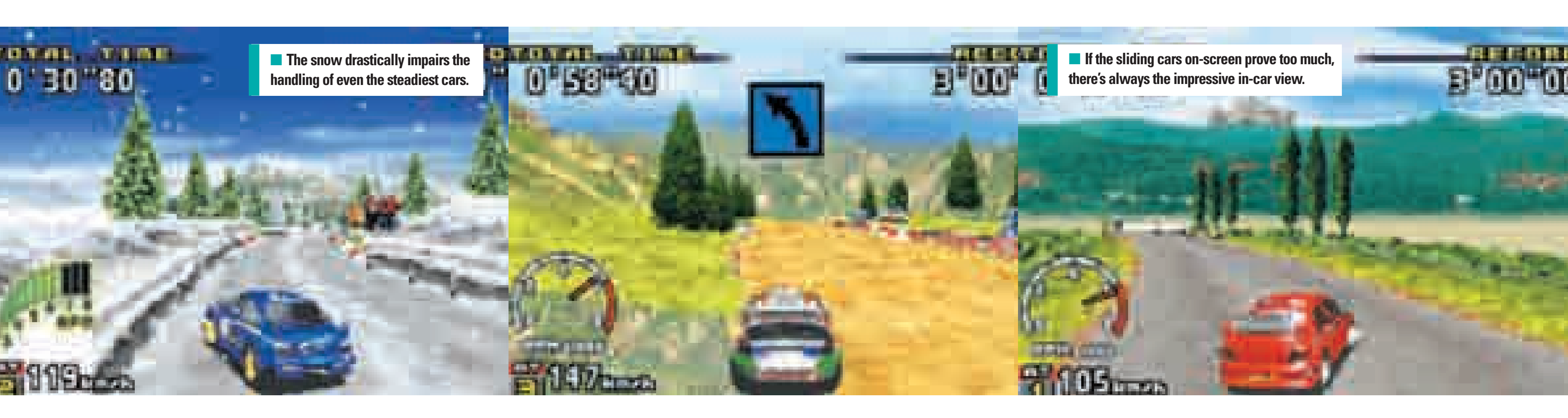
Following in the footsteps of the sublime *Metroid Fusion*, *SEGA Rally* takes a well-known title, tweaks it and throws it at Nintendo's handheld wonder with what look to be excellent results.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SEGA Rosso
RELEASE: March
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2

The Arcade and Saturn classic gets a 21st Century facelift.

"AS CLOSE TO THE SATURN VERSION AS YOU COULD POSSIBLY EXPECT FROM THE GBA"



The snow drastically impairs the handling of even the steadiest cars.

If the sliding cars on-screen prove too much, there's always the impressive in-car view.


eMag

SILENT HILL 3


Horrible imagery makes a stomach-churning return, as does the fascination with chain link fencing.

ARE YOU READY TO GO BACK TO KONAMI'S TERROR TOWN?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Black is the new black in the most screwed-up town the world has ever seen. Have a nice day, now…

If you want to freak people out, prey on all the obvious fears. *Resident Evil* has always played the suspense card very well – it works wonders in conjunction with the oversized bugs, snakes and other nightmarish creatures. The *Silent Hill* games have taken a different stance, opting for psychological horror and the ominous use of sound to render the player uneasy. Coupled with the overwhelming darkness and reliance on a feeble torch, Konami's creepy capers continue to be among the few genuinely eerie videogames that don't rely on jumpy shocks. For this third outing, expect more unrecognisable freaks, deranged residents and inexplicable events – it just wouldn't be *Silent Hill* without them.

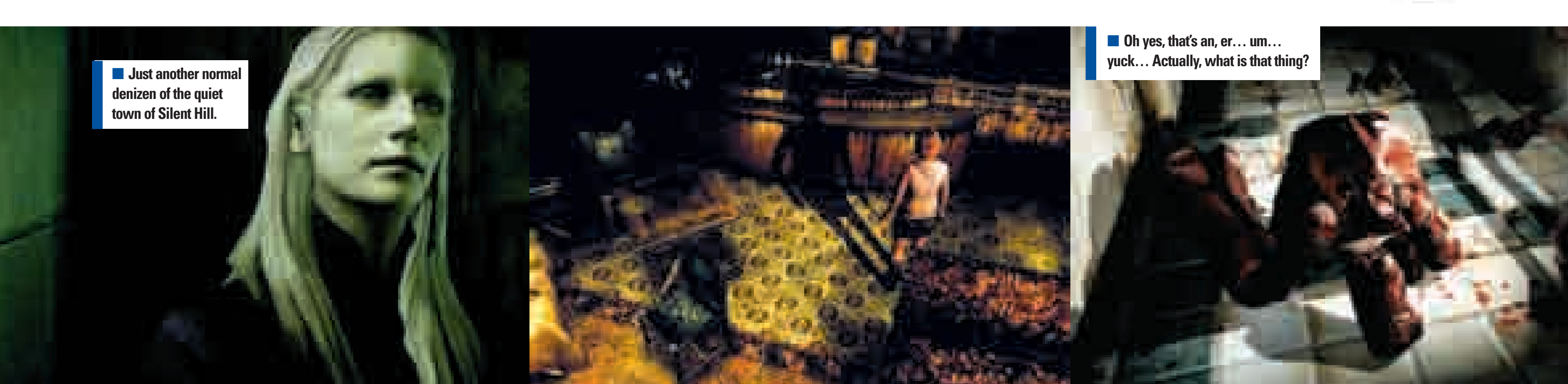
Those of you who've already paid a visit to *Silent Hill* will undoubtedly see the similarities between the previous games and this new batch of shots from the tourist information brochure. The series has developed its own style and won't be shaken from it – no bad thing as it provides a sense of continuity despite a

"CONTINUING ITS REIGN OF TERROR, SILENT HILL 3 IS ALREADY MORE THAN A LITTLE UNNERVING"

lack of recurring characters. Graphically, it's looking even prettier than ever (in a strange sense of the word) and that all-important lighting engine still impresses, highlighting every contour of each encountered freak while leaving plenty of darkness to keep you guessing. If you were hoping for some kind of sensible plot or obvious enemies, you might want to look elsewhere – both will undoubtedly follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and journey endlessly into the deeply surreal.

While we've only been blessed with a fleeting glimpse of the next instalment from the Hill (that's Silent, not Grange), we're already impressed with what we've witnessed. If these elements can surpass those of the previous titles in the series, we should be in for something special. We're promised the same blend of puzzling, fighting and running (and hiding behind the sofa) as before, only this time the more impressive aesthetics will bring the nightmare to life even more vividly.

Konami is insisting that this will be the most terrifying trip into *Silent Hill* to date and we'd say they're probably right. Currently being turned from 'moderately freaky' into 'scary as hell', *Silent Hill 3* is due for release later this year, and could very well be one nightmare that you won't want to wake up from.


Just another normal denizen of the quiet town of Silent Hill.

Oh yes, that's an, er… um… yuck… Actually, what is that thing?


eMag

FABLE

FABLE IS LIKE A BOX OF CHOCOLATES – YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GONNA GET NEXT

All too often RPGs force the player in a singular direction. Just look at *Final Fantasy* – everything that happens to the leading characters is dictated by a rigid storyline, limiting exploration to an often far too linear path. In contrast to this rather staid routine (which hasn't really been overhauled since the days of the SNES), Big Blue Box is hoping that *Fable* (formerly known as *Project Ego*) will change the face of RPGs forever.

The story centres around a 12-year-old boy whose mother and sister are mysteriously kidnapped as the unseen forces of evil slowly take over his home world of Albion. Faced with the prospect of a lifetime alone, the young boy sets out on an arduous journey to locate his father, a brave hero who may be able to help him. But it soon becomes apparent that evil is taking over the land faster than anyone had imagined and is turning all known heroes into power-crazed warriors. And so what starts out as one boy's quest to save his family soon becomes a mission to save the entire world.

True, the storyline may not be particularly original or ingenious, but it isn't really integral to progression, as tends to the case with many RPGs. What's integral to this game is character evolution and developing relationships with the people you meet along the way. And the part that's totally unique? Well, the plan is that no two adventures will be the same – the way each player approaches tasks will affect both the way the character matures and the manner in which other people treat him along the way. Literally every choice the player makes, every character encountered and every fight fought changes the way your character grows. Spending lots of time in battle, for example, may increase the size of your muscles – this will impress the ladies, but battle scars could scare away potential allies.

Of course, such things have been attempted in the past – *Creatures*, *Black And White* and, more recently, *Animal Crossing* have all been based around the evolution of a character. But there are a couple of things that set *Fable* apart from the competition. Firstly, there are many more variables affecting both the visual and social evolution of the character. Sunlight tans the skin and exercise encourages muscular development, for example, while fashion decisions (such as clothing, haircuts and tattoos) will affect your social status in different communities. The best part is that resident townsfolk will actually react to your actions – for example, the village children may mimic your hairstyle or clothing if you perform a particularly courageous task.

On top of all this, *Fable* offers the player a magnificent fairytale land, complete with peculiar creatures and wonderfully rich fantasy environments. The player will be able to decide whether they want to take the path of a warrior and master the sword, or the path of a wizard by learning magic. Either way, the creatures that inhabit Albion are intelligent enough to know whether or not they have the upper hand in battle and will retreat to the safety of the undergrowth if they become overpowered.

But for all the promises, we can't help feeling that *Fable* may end up being a little disappointing. As with *Black And White*, the developers are trying so hard to create something new that they may overlook fundamental aspects of the gameplay. But everything seems to be in place (aside from a few frame rate and animation issues) so we're going to keep an open mind.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Big Blue Box
RELEASE: 2003 TBC
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

With *Fable*, developer Big Blue Box is hoping to reinvent the RPG genre by creating an organic, lifelike experience that evolves around every decision the player makes.

FINE ART

Part of the appeal of *Final Fantasy* and other big Japanese RPGs is the artistic style. Even *Final Fantasy VII*, with its low-res PSone pre-renders, used some of the most dramatic FMV sequences ever created. But Western developers have struggled to match that level of creativity. Copycat titles such as *Silver* may look similar to Squaresoft's masterpiece on first impressions, but simply can't match it in terms of dramatic direction. *Fable* is an attempt to create a fairytale atmosphere and so far it appears to be achieving this. The brief footage we've seen reveals levels of sophistication comparable to famous fantasy artists such as Brian Froud. Eerie shadows, magical forests, trolls, fairies… they're all here.

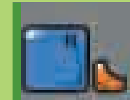
"A MAGNIFICENT FAIRYTALE LAND, WITH PECULIAR CREATURES AND RICH FANTASY ENVIRONMENTS"



If you're mean to enough people, your physical appearance will gradually evolve to mirror your personality.

A bit late for a young 'un to be out by himself, isn't it?





COMPANY PROFILE

■ Based near Guildford, Big Blue Box was founded in 1999 with support from Peter Molyneux and his current development company, Lionhead Studios. Headed by Simon Carter, Dene Carter and Ian Lovett, this potentially pioneering new company plans to take the RPG genre in new and exciting directions.

HISTORY

■ Fable is the first product to be developed by Big Blue Box

■ Are you a brave hero? If you look like this then the answer's probably yes.

■ Is she friend or foe? Judging by the size of those claws, we'd rather not risk anything.

■ Don't worry – it's only a statue. The real enemies aren't anywhere near as scary. Really.

"WHETHER OR NOT YOU GO OFF, GET MARRIED AND HAVE KIDS IS TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY UP TO YOU"

PETER MOLYNEUX, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

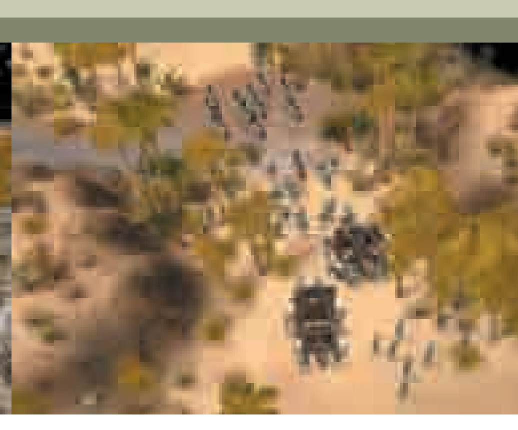
ONCE UPON A TIME...

FINAL FANTASY - LINEARITY + ANIMAL CROSSING = FABLE

PRAETORIANS


Bridges are vital for moving troops, so they're seldom unguarded.


Units on foot don't move so well on snow or in dense forests – expect the enemy to use this against you.



IS IT TRUE THAT ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME? FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF…

Blending history and gaming is no new concept; in fact, by giving gamers familiar settings, characters, races and scenarios, a lot of the impetus is taken from needing detailed prologues and explanations. While the only people who'll buy a *Star Wars* game would be those familiar with Wookies and Ewoks, everybody knows about the Romans, giving a much wider potential audience. Playing on this mighty heritage, *Praetorians* puts you in command of legions of Roman soldiers with a goal to expand and conquer your way to victory for the glory of Rome. As a PC game, there was a 99 per cent chance that this would be either an FPS or an RTS and, given the lack of firearms in Ancient Rome, it falls into the latter category.

Action is unit-based – where similar titles can become overcomplicated with individual control of each soldier, you'll command squads of around 30 units, allowing for close control of your army even when the screen is positively bursting with Romans. Special units stand alone, letting you use their specific abilities at will and giving you an easy escape route for those less battle-ready, such as the essential Physicians and Scouts.

From what we've seen so far, conflict works rather well – the closest thing we've seen to the action is the *Warhammer* titles of old, albeit in a much more polished form here. Visuals are more than functional – though in-game models suffer a little due to the sheer number that can be displayed at once – but other displays, terrain and presentation are really quite pretty. This is complemented by the excellent speech and effects; the period music and ambience are of a wonderful standard and really finish the package off well.

Praetorians will not be without competition when it launches next month – even if we don't see another thinking man's game this year, the PC has so many renowned strategy titles in its back catalogue that virtually every era, race and land has been strategically recreated at some point. This is by no means wishing ill of Pyro's upcoming (and mostly impressive) thinker – it's just that it's such a crowded market that a newcomer will have to kick up quite a fuss to make any impact. If what we've seen is anything to go by, the game is looking as good as many of its competitors. It'll just be down to good publicity if the Romans are to rule once more.

"A SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT PRODUCT TO STAND OUT IN THE CROWDED PC RTS MARKET"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Europe
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios
RELEASE: March
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (1 online TBC)

Guide the Roman Empire to glory one legion at a time in a large-scale RTS with its roots firmly in the history books.


Using high ground to extend vision and range is a skill you'll need to learn early.


eMag

WAR OF THE MONSTERS

HUGE MONSTERS INVARIABLY HAVE TO BREAK SOMETHING, SO WHY NOT MAKE IT EACH OTHER?



■ Kineticlops is an odd one and no mistake – nothing but an eyeball and more volts than we can keep track of.

PS2 **How do these giant freaks we see in countless old-school monster movies get so big?** If they were supposed to be so large, surely we'd find huge creatures' lairs scattered around the world, or perhaps the remnants of a gigantic supermarket from a time when massive monsters roamed the earth… but we digress. Sony has decided to have a go at the 'giant monster combat' genre (seldom used on the grounds that most games are awful) to see what it can do. After the release of the lacklustre *Godzilla: DAMM* that graced the GameCube, there's a definite opening for a monster fighter to reign supreme – something Sony hopes to capitalise on with *War Of The Monsters*.

For what it is, *War Of The Monsters* is a fairly complex affair. Every button on the Dual Shock 2 is used in the battering of other freaks – for close range blows, fireballs, locking-on and (rather importantly) guarding. Every creature has the same amount of energy and roughly the same attack power, but the specials are where the monsters differ the most. Each oversized mutant has two special abilities – one is a projectile while the other is a short-range but ultra-powerful blast. As is to be expected from this kind of game, the surroundings are far from safe – nudging a structure causes a brief tremor and being thrown into the side of a building will reduce it to rubble, causing extra damage. On top of this, you can pick up much of the debris and traffic to hurl at your opponents – impaling the Godzilla lookalike with a radio tower is a particular highlight.

"AN UNDOUBTEDLY EXCELLENT CONCEPT THAT POSITIVELY SMACKS OF RAMPAGE AT ITS BEST"

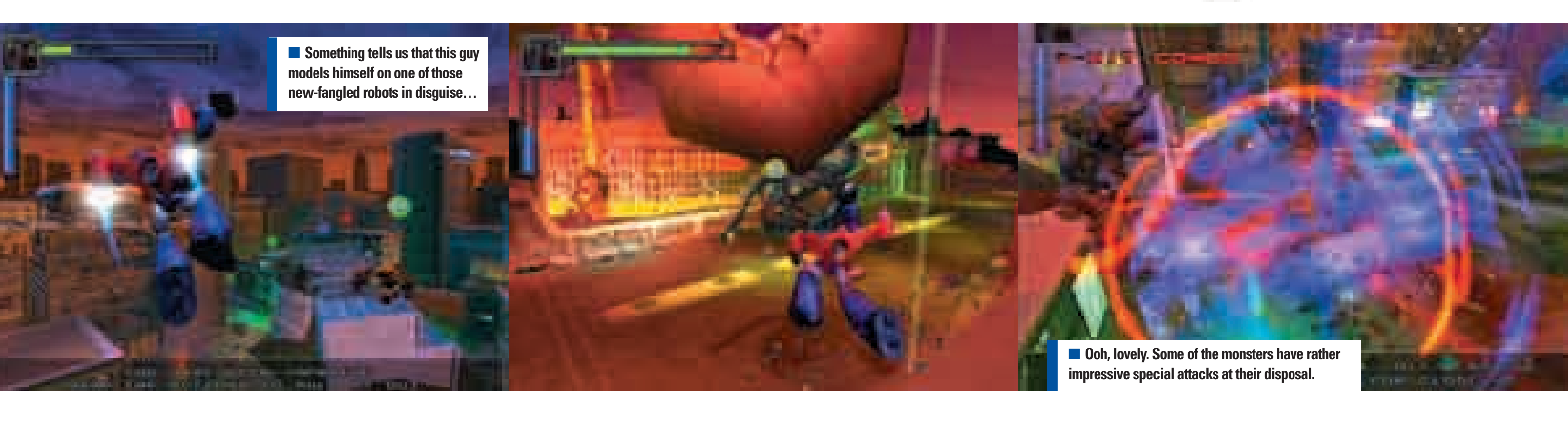
The monsters on offer are fairly generic, but that's no great surprise for a game that draws its inspiration from classic monster movies of old such as *Godzilla* and *King Kong*. As well as a homage to these two well-known beasts, there are giant bugs, transforming cyborgs, military droids and the house favourite, a hulking one-eyed beast made of pure energy. Several modes are on offer, giving the player the option to attempt a quick bout, an endless onslaught or a full adventure that steals many a scene and location from countless B-movies.

Already, *War Of The Monsters* is a fairly enjoyable, if slightly insubstantial, fighter with its tongue not lodged as firmly in its cheek as it may appear. Lets just hope it doesn't stomp off into the sea before we can review it…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ Playing on the fact that there hasn't ever really been a game to make us praise the day Godzilla was created, Sony tries its hand at the little-known 'big monsters having a scrap' genre.



■ Something tells us that this guy models himself on one of those new-fangled robots in disguise…

■ Ooh, lovely. Some of the monsters have rather impressive special attacks at their disposal.


eMag

GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE



Golden Sun: The Lost Age looks lovely. Even if it is a bit familiar…

NOW YOU CAN CARRY A FANTASY WORLD AROUND IN YOUR POCKET

Many consider Camelot's previous handheld adventure to be the pinnacle of mobile role-playing and it's easy to see why – impressive to both eye and ear and full to bursting with places to go, people to talk to and things to do. In fact, our only real criticism of *Golden Sun* would be that it ends too soon and too abruptly for our liking, but at least now we understand why.

The Lost Age continues from exactly where the first game leaves off, but sees an all-new set of characters journeying through the familiar and the unexplored alike. RPG loathers needn't panic – there's nothing here to change your minds about the genre. Turn-based battles, orcs, magic and hackneyed plots have their place in the hearts of many – if this includes you, there's every reason to get excited about *Golden Sun* part two.

After a brief session with the Japanese version of the game, we were amazed to see just how similar it is to the first outing. It doesn't help matters that the game begins in a familiar location from the latter half of the original *Golden Sun* with many enemies and locations having been seen before. Pretty soon though, the game truly begins on a vast new continent – here, you'll be able to battle new fiends, master new Psyenergy and see out the remainder of the first part of the story. Looking, sounding and playing identically to the previous game, the only real difference is the new story and characters involved. This is more or less understandable – the presentation of the original title was (and still is) top flight and hard to fault to the point that you have to wonder just how much further the GBA technology can be pushed.

We've seen enough new ideas to keep the formula sufficiently fresh but the core game is extremely similar; no surprise really seeing as how *The Lost Age* is more of a concluding chapter than a true sequel. There's also the option of loading data from the previous game but we've not been able to take this for a spin yet.

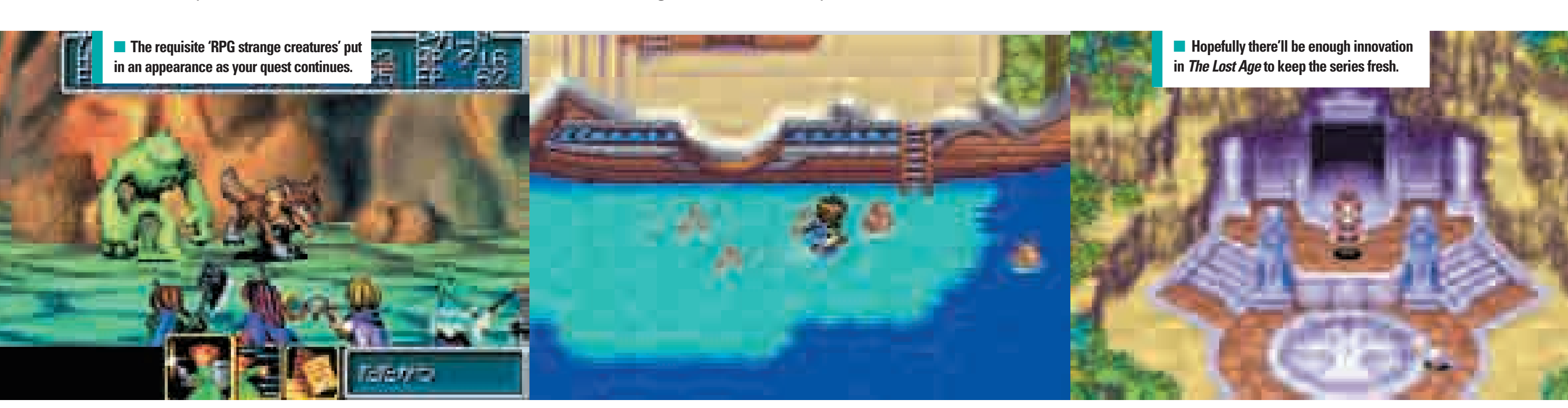
So what are you waiting for? Dust off that copy of *Golden Sun* and get it finished – we've got a sneaking suspicion you'll need to have completed the first game to get the most out of *The Lost Age* when it comes to these shores later in the year.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Camelot
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

Portable RPG goodness in the second chapter of the *Golden Sun* saga. Very similar to the first game, though.

"SIMILARITIES TO THE FIRST GAME ARE OVERWHELMING – THIS IS MORE A CONTINUATION THAN A SEQUEL"



The requisite 'RPG strange creatures' put in an appearance as your quest continues.

Hopefully there'll be enough innovation in *The Lost Age* to keep the series fresh.


eMag

THE MARK OF KRI

IT'S THEIR PARTY AND THEY'LL KRI IF THEY WANT TO…


The triple lock-on system assigns a different button to each enemy. Handy that.

The PlayStation2 is not short of quality adventure games, with many coming directly through Sony themselves. Styles vary considerably, too – we've had, among others, *Ico*, *Jak And Daxter* and *Extermination*, which are all suitably different in terms of styling, themes and content. With this title and *Primal* on the 'forthcoming attractions' board, the list looks set to get even longer. So far, we've generally known exactly what to expect from these games within several minutes of loading. Alas, not this time. The cryptic name gives us no indication of what lies in store – and even once we do get up and running, first impressions prove to be somewhat misleading. *The Mark Of Kri* is not what it seems.

As the game begins, we take note of the rather special Disney-style visuals that grace our screens – models and animation are suitably cartoony and even the loading screens depict hand-drawn scenes that wouldn't look out of place in most animated movies. Enjoying this relaxed feel, we get on with our basic tasks and set about practising sword techniques on emotionless sandbag dummies – ten minutes later, we're using the same moves on hordes of enemies but the results are a lot less, er, family-orientated. Blood splatters and bodies fly as you scythe though the angry mobs – some of the moves at your disposal are just plain vicious, not to mention fairly simple to execute (no pun intended).

Excellent use of the twin analog sticks allows swift and simple lock-ons to flow into seemingly endless combos as you dance around opponents. While not perfect, the triple lock-on (which assigns an enemy to each of the X, Square and Circle buttons) makes battles look impressive as well as giving you ample control over who you maim next.

A stray blade will bounce off hard walls and get stuck in wood or soil if thrust too hard, so you'll need to pay close attention to where you pick your fights. Movement controls can be a little clunky as so much of the pad is devoted to combat, but what remains is more than functional, and features like sending out your feathered friend to scout for enemies or retrieve items really give *The Mark Of Kri* a unique feel.

If you're looking for something a little different to occupy your time later this year, keep an eye on this one. If what we've seen is anything to go by, this should be a stylish and deep adventure.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Don't be fooled by the cutesy façade – this is a violent and epic adventure.

"THIS GAME IS ALREADY LOOKING POLISHED – WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE FINISHED PRODUCT"


Your unfeasibly small neck belies your skill and dexterity.

Go on! Aim for the vital, er, backside?


eMag

SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS



"A GENUINE TACTICAL TEST THAT REQUIRES INTELLIGENCE AND LATERAL THINKING AS MUCH AS SHARP-SHOOTING SKILLS TO ADAPT AND SURVIVE"

SCEE PRESS RELEASE

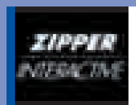
■ You'll control a team of four operatives on your missions. And they all look like tadpoles.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CONSTRUCTING THE PERFECT SOLDIER

COUNTER STRIKE - KEYBOARD + VOICE COMMUNICATION = SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS

■ Your missions will take place in a variety of environments. Best to pack a capsule wardrobe.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Founded in Washington in 1995, Zipper has developed predominantly PC titles – *SOCOM* is their first effort on the PlayStation2. It's hardly surprising that most of their previous work has been of a strategic or military nature – several of the team previously worked on *SimNet*, the US Military training program.

HISTORY

- **CRIMSON SKIES** 2000 [PC]
- **MECHWARRIOR 3: PIRATE'S MOON** 1999 [PC]
- **DEATH DROME** 1997 [PC]

SMASH TERRORISM WITH PLAYSTATION2'S FLAGSHIP ONLINE TITLE

PS2

Why is that people have developed a fixation with military games? Titles like *Medal Of Honor, Counter Strike* and *Operation Flashpoint* all depict pretty realistic military situations yet all three have attained notable success both critically and at retail. This latest addition to the military stealth and tactics family (an area which seems to be growing at an exponential rate) takes what will be a familiar concept to many PC gamers while adding the ubiquitous console twist. *SOCOM*'s faith lies predominantly in much the same place as Microsoft's online hopes – the untapped power of the microphone. PC-heads may have been simultaneously talking and gaming for some time, but now it's the turn of the console owner to practise multitasking.

It's an obvious comparison but similarities between *SOCOM* and *Counter Strike* are very noticeable. If anything, Sony's shooter takes a more realistic slant on the peacekeeping, as missions can be failed in a matter of seconds. Action happens at a fair pace and you'll need to keep full control of your four-man squad – one controlled character and three to whom you can give orders and directions – if you want to succeed in your operations (twelve of which make up the single-player game) that span the globe and test your counter-terrorist skills. After a detailed set-up menu where you can fully customize the equipment of your entire team, your squad is deployed in the thick of the action and many missions require you to act quickly or be discovered and face potential failure. As a rule of thumb, the longer you stay hidden, the longer you stay alive.

Control is relatively normal (apart from the microphone) with two fairly standard settings that should cover most playing styles, and both give a surprising amount of control over your operative. But while you are at the helm of the elite strike force, it does seem a little easy to fail important objectives. On numerous occasions, one of our AI comrades was spotted blowing our cover and failing an early task. Thankfully, this doesn't immediately fail the mission but the more of these objectives you flunk, the tougher the rest of the mission becomes and the worse your grade will be should you manage to succeed in the rest of the tasks assigned to you. But for all the frustration this causes it does add some replay value.

At a time where it's trendy to be a soldier (or a digital one, at least), we can see *SOCOM* doing rather well over here. A lot will depend on Sony's ability to get its network up and running and promoting the game to get a workable European user base, but if these are successful we see no reason why this shouldn't be as popular a lead online title as those on any other console. *SOCOM* isn't doing much new but as an experience it's a good solid title with the added benefit of having the 'gimmick' (for want of a better word) of the voice commands – Sony's plans to dispel the unique nature of Microsoft's Xbox Live Communicator may well be cunningly effective. There's no word yet on what future titles (if any) will take advantage of the headset, but with Microsoft offering support for its mic in practically every online game Sony might need to join the party. If the recent success of Xbox Live in the US is anything to go by, we'd say Sony will need to be firing on all cylinders to scupper it...

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1 (2-16 online)

■ *Counter Strike* may not be coming to the PS2 but Sony makes sure we get the next best thing. Tactical, online, sneaky and rather good too...

> "AS A RULE OF THUMB, THE LONGER YOU STAY HIDDEN, THE LONGER YOU STAY ALIVE"

QUIET IN THE BACK

The bundled microphone that comes with *SOCOM* is one of the most important tools in the game. You'll need to stay in touch with your team-mates in order to establish waypoints, targets and strategies, all without the keyboard nightmares associated with similar PC titles. Additionally, some rather nifty voice recognition allows you to chat with the AI in the single-player missions too. Thankfully, it works a hell of a lot better than the likes of *Hey You, Pikachu!* and a vast amount of PC voice recognition software (possibly due to the more restricted nature of just barking orders at comrades). If this level of interactivity is adopted by future games, we reckon the Xbox Live Communicator will be a very popular piece of kit.



■ Pick your equipment, but make sure your team has a good variety – a squad of snipers is pretty pointless.

■ Jungle missions will have you negotiating treacherous forests and rickety rope bridges.

DINO CRISIS 3


The unfinished form of a genetically modified dinosaur makes its way towards Patrick. Run, perhaps?

IN SPACE, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU DISMEMBER A DINOSAUR

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Autumn TBC (Japan: Spring TBC/US: Summer TBC)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Now more like *Devil May Cry* than just *Resident Evil* with dinosaurs.

Since revealing its intentions to bring *Dino Crisis* to Xbox last June, Capcom has been incredibly secretive about its plans for the latest instalment in the series. In fact, things have been so quiet that, until we recently asked the company how the game was shaping up, **games**™ thought that the project may have been canned completely. But fear not, Capcom has now released a new batch of screenshots, as well as a few new details regarding the storyline and gameplay.

The game is set on a Colony Spaceship named Ozumandias in the year 2548. A group of Intergalactic Marines (including the gallant lead character, heroically named Patrick) are sent to locate the ship and retrieve any surviving passengers. As you'd expect, their inspection reveals that something has gone amiss and, rather than discovering a group of grateful survivors, the team ends up face to face with a horde of hungry, genetically modified dinosaurs. Early indications suggest that the story has been carefully crafted so the designers can achieve something along the lines of films like *Event Horizon* or *Aliens*.

"THE GAMEPLAY IS MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE THAN THE PREVIOUS TWO DINO CRISIS GAMES"

Also carefully crafted is the gameplay, which is now much more flexible than the previous two *Dino Crisis* games. The futuristic space setting has enabled the designers to fit each of the characters with jetpacks, presumably so they can offer a control system similar to the one developed for *Devil May Cry* on PS2 – this should give the player an almost acrobatic freedom of movement. The inclusion of jetpacks also means that 30-foot high dinosaurs can be shot at from their eye level, rather than yours.

The only other information Capcom has released at this stage is that the game will go on sale in Japan this spring, though no date has been finalised. The European date is more vague, though we've good reason to believe that the title will launch around September. This would make sense from Capcom's point of view – Christmas sales will undoubtedly be monopolised by *Halo 2* and *Project Gotham Racing 2*. Of course, the quality of the product will also play a big part in the way the game is perceived – though judging by the quality of Capcom's latest offerings (*Resident Evil Zero* and *Steel Battalion*), there's nothing to worry about in that department.


The early screenshots reveal that bump-mapping is being used to emphasize the texture of dinosaur skin.

What big teeth you have, grandma. Luckily, Patrick comes equipped with some powerful weapons to knock them out.


eMag

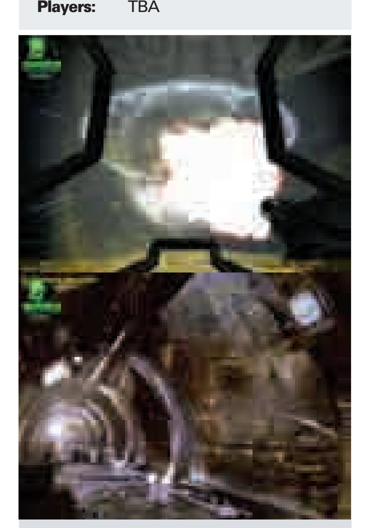
SHOWCASE

THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

AQUANOX 2: REVELATION

BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: JoWood
Developer: Massive Development
Release: March '03
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: TBA



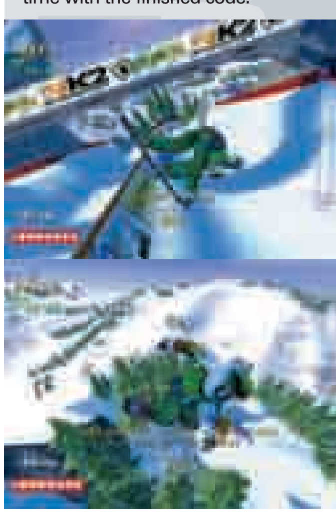
When it comes to vehicles that offer action-packed, fast-paced shoot-'em-up action, what do you think of? Cars? Planes? Maybe even spaceships? Well, try adding submarines to that list. Despite not being the fastest vehicles on the planet in real life, JoWood's *Aquanox 2* looks set to make them the weapon of choice for PC gamers. Set way in the future after the Earth has been ravaged by nuclear war (yep, can't wait for that one), it's your job as mercenary William Drake to complete over a hundred different missions, destroy enemies and keep the cash rolling in so you can upgrade your vessel. Fingers crossed, we'll have a full review next issue.

1080°: AVALANCHE

LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW

Format: GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Release: Q1 '03
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4

It's been in the offing for absolutely ages now, but finally it looks as though Nintendo are getting ready to release *1080°: Avalanche* (the sequel to the N64's *1080° Snowboarding*). Naturally, Nintendo are being quiet about many aspects of the game – such as how the trick system might work, how many tracks there'll be or which characters on top of Rob Haywood , Dion Blaster and Kensuke Kimachi will be returning. From what we've seen so far, the game looks rather lovely. However, we'll reserve judgement on whether it can be as good as the current king of the snowboarders, *SSX Tricky*, until we've had more time with the finished code.



DEVASTATION

THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED, AS ROY CASTLE ONCE SAID

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Novalogic
Developer: Digitalo
Release: March '03
Genre: FPS
Players: TBA



Not wanting to nitpick, but why is it that all games set in the future feature a world blighted by war and corporate greed? Can't we have one where everyone lives together in peace and harmony? Probably not – especially if Novalogic has its way with *Devastation*. Although it might look like every other futuristic FPS out there today, *Devastation* features some pretty nifty elements that help to push it further ahead. Not only does it use a souped-up version of the *Unreal* engine, but you can also interact with and use virtually any item or piece of scenery to your advantage. Due in March, we'll have a full review for you next month.

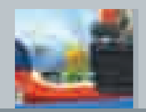
AMPLITUDE

IT SURE SOUNDS GOOD TO US

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Music
Players: 1-2

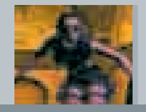
As far as the rhythm-action genre goes, 2002 was an undeniably strong year, and one of the most original and addictive titles to emerge snuck out through Sony themselves. Indeed, such is the challenge and allure of Harmonix's *FreQuency* that we still regularly go back for more. Suffice to say, we're more than a little excited at the prospect of this sequel. The more we hear about online support, duel modes and big artists like David Bowie, Weezer and Garbage all being featured, the more we need this game. Like, now. Out in the States in the next few months, expect a UK release in the latter half of 2003 and a review as soon as we can stop playing it.





DELAYED – ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER (GC)

■ Despite the fact that we've already been enjoying the Japanese version for a couple of months, the game now isn't due out in the UK until 3 May, over a month after the US release. Bugger.



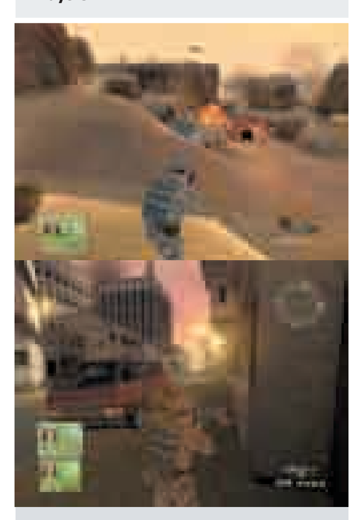
DELAYED – TOMB RAIDER (PS2/PC)

■ Well, there's a shock. Although the official line was that the game was due out in February (that's now, in case you hadn't noticed), we can tell you that Lara won't be arriving until the end of April.

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

DIG OUT THE DESERT CAMOUFLAGE

Format: GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: SCi
Developer: Pivotal
Release: March '03
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: TBA



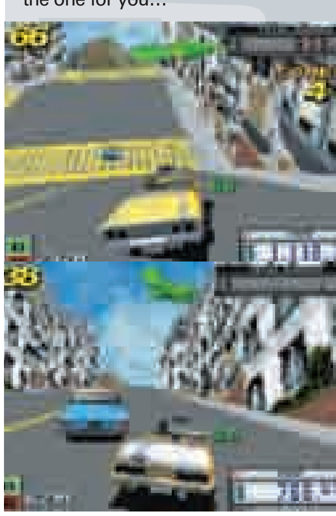
You know, we never wanted to be soldiers when we were young – too much running around in the dirt and getting shot at for our liking really. Still, if trekking across deserts in khaki camouflage is your bag then the GameCube version of *Conflict: Desert Storm* will be right up your alley. Set against the sandy backdrop of the Gulf War (now there's a surprise), the game utilises a number of new features over its PS2 and Xbox cousins – most notably, the use of the upcoming sequel's graphics engine which makes things look even better than it did before. Gung-ho heroes should look for this arriving in May – we'll have a full preview for you next issue.

CRAZY TAXI: CATCH A RIDE

TIME TO MAKE SOME CRAZY MONEY

Format: GBA
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Racing
Players: 1

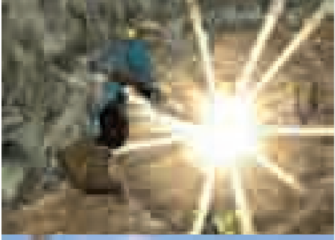
If you'd have told us back when *Crazy Taxi* came out on the Dreamcast that we'd soon be playing the same game on a handheld, we'd have laughed in your face. Of course, things are looking a bit different now with not just one, but three totally amazing Dreamcast-to-Game Boy Advance ports; *Virtua Tennis*, *Jet Set Radio* and *Crazy Taxi*. To be honest, we're as shocked as you are. From what we've seen so far, *Crazy Taxi* (running on a similar engine to *SEGA Rally*) is looking to be something rather special indeed and features some very familiar level settings. If picking up people on your GBA sounds fun, this is the one for you…



SUIKODEN 3

RPG FANS, START DRIBBLING NOW…

Format: PS2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: Out Now (US)
Genre: RPG
Players: 1





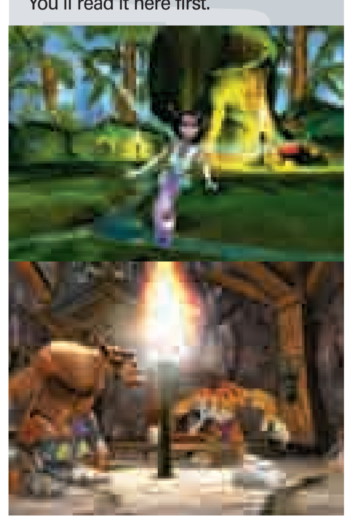
Apart from *Final Fantasy X*, the PS2 has been rather bereft of decent RPGs – that's why the upcoming release of *Suikoden 3* has got us more excited than several large Alsatians on heat. Picking up the story some 15 years after the last *Suikoden* game, Konami's latest adventure lets you take control of not just one, but three different characters and experience three separate sides to the story. There's also an original battle engine and (thanks to the new 3D engine) some absolutely gorgeous graphics. Unfortunately, it looks like the game won't get released in Europe, but as it's such a great game we'll be covering the US version in the next issue.

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

THE PROOF OF MICROSOFT'S EXPENSIVE PUDDING

Format: Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Rare
Release: Q3 '03
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1

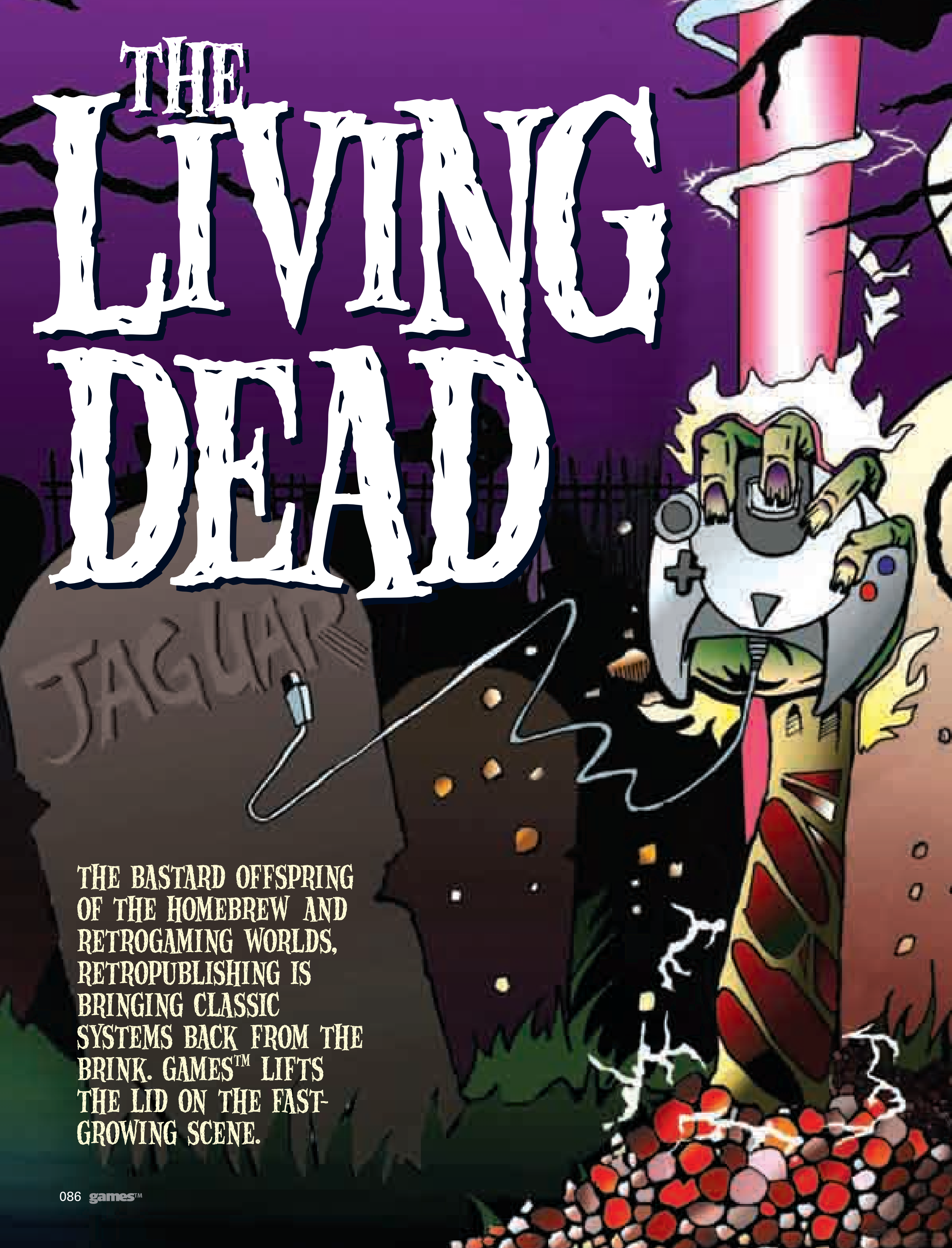
So, Microsoft spent a small fortune on the development 'giant' that is Rare last year – what have they got to show for it? So far, it's just a large building in the middle of a field and a list of games in development. First up is *Kameo: Elements Of Power* – once a GameCube project, now being created exclusively for Xbox and due out sometime in the Spring. Although details on the game are scarce (you play a fairy who can control animals and, er, that's all Rare has told anyone), it certainly looks very nice at the moment. Still, we can't help feeling that it's not going to be appearing any time soon. Will it be worth the wait? You'll read it here first.





The hedgehog sleeps with the fishes… **Sonic The Hedgehog MegaDrive [SEGA] 1991**





THE LIVING DEAD

THE BASTARD OFFSPRING OF THE HOMEBREW AND RETROGAMING WORLDS, RETROPUBLISHING IS BRINGING CLASSIC SYSTEMS BACK FROM THE BRINK. GAMES™ LIFTS THE LID ON THE FAST-GROWING SCENE.



The era of bedroom coding is long dead, replaced by a PlayStation-inspired stampede to multi-million pound budgets and development teams numbering in dozens rather than three-man bands. The cottage industry beginnings out of which the modern games industry emerged are now just a distant memory. The hobbyist, homebrew and experimentalist spirit that propelled the games industry to its current heights seems a thing of the past.

However, far away from the coalface of mainstream gaming, the bedroom coding aesthetic is undergoing a revival in the most unexpected of places – the classic consoles and computers, long thought dead by most gamers.

From landmark systems like the Amiga to also-rans like the PC Engine, a vibrant and increasingly confident community of coders, publishers and devotees have been breathing new life into these and other dead machines by releasing brand new games. Since its quiet beginnings in the late Nineties, the retropublishing scene has grown to a point where many of its games are now sought-after collectors' items and the healthiness of the consoles and computers being supported is at its highest for years. But why on Earth is anyone releasing Vectrex and Jaguar games in the 21st Century? If there is a single event that marked the beginning of it all, it was probably the formation of Atari console publisher Songbird Productions back in 1999. Carl Forhan, Songbird's founder, has always had a soft spot for Atari and jumped at the chance to resurrect old systems.

"I've been an Atari fan since the VCS and even more so once I realised fans were learning how to make games for the Jaguar and Lynx as well," he explains. "It sounded like a dream come true to me, even though Atari was self-destructing.

"I hacked on the Lynx and Jaguar for a couple



STAR STRIKE

Many games, like *Star Strike* for the SEGA CD, were completed but never published. The rise of retrogaming has seen these games unearthed and distributed to loyal fans and amateur programmers.

of years until in 1999 I was ready to release multiple games – some of which I had developed and some of which I had licensed. And at this point I founded Songbird to publish these and help others publish Atari games as well."

Starting with self-developed games *Protector* on the Jaguar and *Pong*-clone *Ponx* on the Lynx, Songbird soon began tracking down games that were dumped after the Jaguar and Lynx's demise with a view to finally releasing them.

"I've spent many hours pursuing these unreleased games and it takes a lot of work but it has worked very well," Forhan says. "However, it's getting more difficult as there's a finite number out there. Often companies will have thrown all the game's code and material away or are not interested in digging it out."

Forhan's success in saving games like *Skyhammer* (a Jaguar game from *Alien vs. Predator* developers Rebellion) was soon mirrored by other companies who began digging out completed-but-unpublished games from the debris of gaming past. Retrogaming Web site Good Deal Games moved into retropublishing by rescuing lost SEGA CD titles *Star Strike* and *Bug Blasters* and, more recently, Oldergames has stormed the scene with a quartet of games for the CD-i as well as SEGA CD game *Citizen X*.

For Good Deal Games's president, Michael Thomasson, saving these games from oblivion was the result of picking up pre-release games at old game shows. "We used to rate software and so would go to the trade shows and get given the pre-release games," Thomasson explains.

"Some of these games never got released and we thought that others would enjoy them too, so we started trying to get the licence to publish them. It's not something a normal business would do as the sales aren't huge, but the people who buy these games do appreciate them."

"ALTHOUGH THE ROOTS OF THE RETROPUBLISHING SCENE ARE IN UNEARTHING COMPLETED-BUT-UNRELEASED GAMES, THE MOVEMENT IS INCREASINGLY LOOKING AT DEVELOPING ORIGINAL GAMES"

However obtaining licences for such games is often harder than it sounds, with lost source code, disinterested publishers, legal minefields and bankrupt firms in abundance.

For example, plans to release SEGA CD title *Star Strike* were almost ruined when developer Stargate Films gave the go-ahead only to find they had lost the code. Luckily a pre-release version was uncovered by Good Deal Games.

Similar problems surrounded forthcoming Good Deal Games/Oldergames title *Penn &*



BOXING

Vec Sports Boxing for the Vectrex is an okay-but-limited title. The restrictions of the machine can be difficult to work with.

BUG BLASTERS

Bug Blasters was intended for the SEGA CD but never made it. It's now been resurrected by retrogaming Web site Good Deal Games.

IMPLODE

It's like *Tetris* but backwards. And in colour. And there are some bomb-type things in there too. Marvellous.

"STAYING ON THE AMIGA MEANS GETTING THE ATTENTION OF THOUSANDS RATHER THAN BEING IGNORED BY MILLIONS ON THE PC"

Teller: Smoke & Mirrors – another SEGA CD title, (based on the American comedian magicians) that never got released due to a legal spat between the original publisher and the owners of the Penn & Teller name.

"It took us around two and a half years to get the licence at a good price," says Thomasson. "It's across two CDs and is actually made up of six to eight joke games based around Penn & Teller. There's one called *Desert Bus* which is a joke on real life where you drive a tow truck on a straight road for something like eight hours flat and at the end you get one point."

BURIED (BUT NOT DEAD) TREASURE

The retropublishing scene's scouring of the past has also uncovered some historically significant titles such as Oldergames's *Jack Sprite vs. The Crimson Ghost* on the CD-i.

"It came out of the backlash against *Night Trap* on the SEGA CD which was attacked at the time by the US Senate for being violent," says RW Bivins, creative director of Oldergames. "The guy who wrote *Night Trap*, Rob Fullop, got ticked off with the bad publicity against games that came out of it and wrote *Jack Sprite* as a

DEAD OR ALIVE?

WE CAST OUR EYE OVER A HANDFUL OF RETROPUBLISHING TITLES

NAME: *Lexis*
FORMAT: Atari Lynx
MANUFACTURER: Songbird Productions
Another spin on *Tetris* but Lexis's union of the classic puzzler with Scrabble is leagues above the usual copycats. Letters replace falling shapes and are removed by making complete words. A more cerebral challenge than *Tetris* although not as hypnotically addictive.

SEVEN OUT OF TEN

NAME: *Protector SE*
FORMAT: Atari Jaguar
MANUFACTURER: Songbird Productions
Making up for the dire *Defender 2000*, *Protector SE* offers Jaguar owners a decent, if not stunning, take on the classic coin-op. Bar the souped-up graphics, little has been added to the original *Defender* template, although the Jaguar's 'unique' controller does its best, as always, to ruin the proceedings.

SIX OUT OF TEN

NAME: *Vec Sports Boxing*
FORMAT: Vectrex
MANUFACTURER: Good Deal Games
Given the limitations of the Vectrex, it's not a shock to find that *Vec Sports Boxing* is a rather simple boxing game. It's no great shakes in gameplay terms, and the tendency for the boxers to end up as a confusing mess of lines doesn't help matters.

TWO OUT OF TEN

NAME: *Implode*
FORMAT: PC Engine CD
MANUFACTURER: MindRec Communications
Effectively *Tetris*-on-rewind, *Implode* turns the classic puzzler on its head but fails miserably to capture its magic. Bonus games *Hump Ball* (a *Pong* variant) and *Crash* (a clone of SEGA's ageing *Head On*) also disappoint, being too simple for their own good. An interesting curio but forgettable gameplay.

FOUR OUT OF TEN

THE LIVING DEAD



CITIZEN X

Citizen X is an Oldergames release for the SEGA CD. Look at all that wonderful FMV – it's like *Night Trap* all over again. Only good. And not particularly controversial.

reply to that. *Jack Sprite*'s a kids' game – a platformer that uses full-motion video – but it never got released because it was completed just as the CD-i was dying."

Although the roots of the retropublishing scene are in unearthing completed-but-unreleased games, the movement is increasingly looking at developing original games.

Songbird has released a number of self-developed titles, primarily on the Lynx, while Good Deal Games has released a Vectrex game, *Vec Sports Boxing*, and is set to start producing new ColecoVision cartridges this year. Oldergames are also following suit with a shareware Commodore 64 adventure, *Weird World*, among other projects.

NEW GAMES FOR OLD

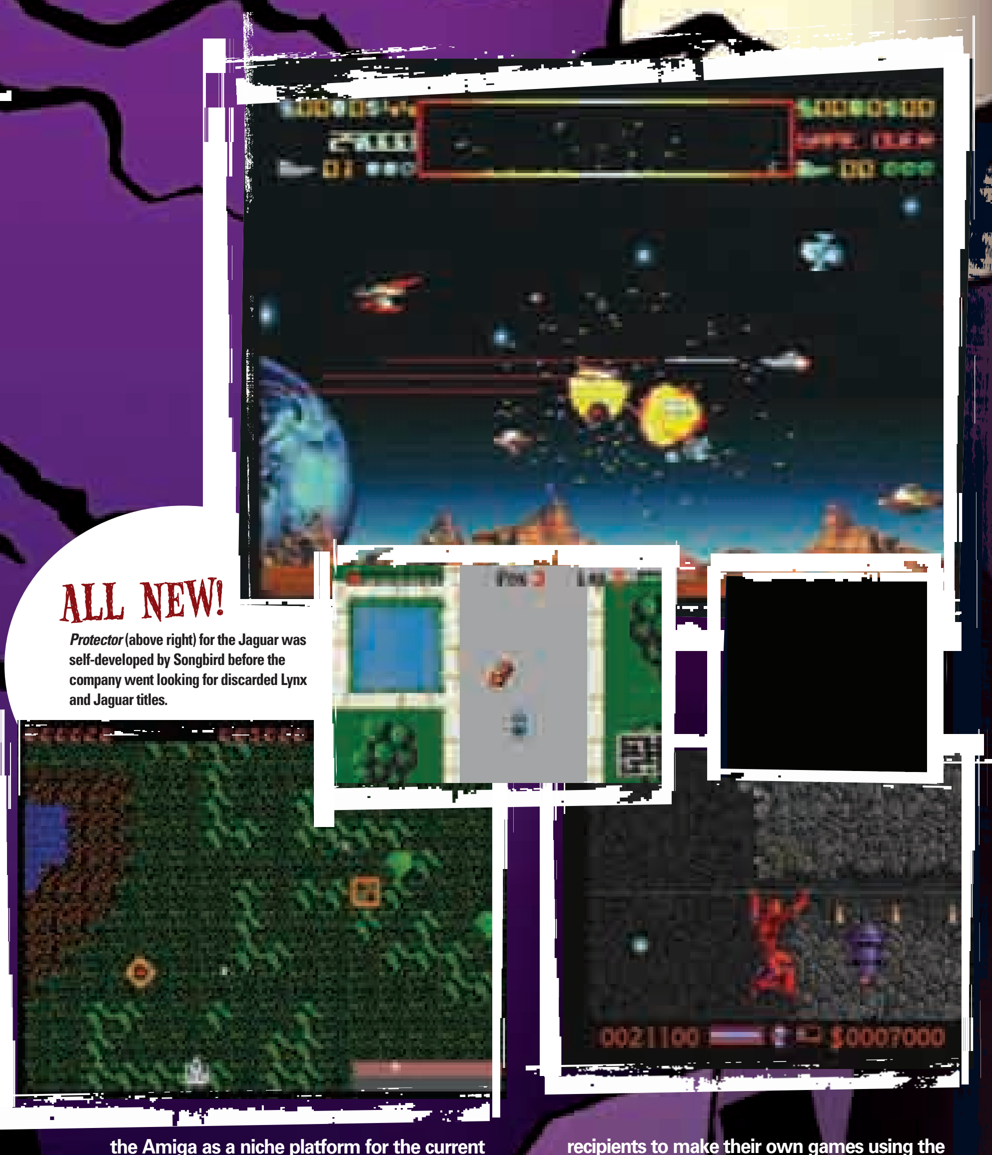
New retropublishers like MindRec are concentrating on original products like their recent PC Engine Super CD title *Implode*, and Dreamcast specialists Cryptic Allusion are looking at releasing a powered-up version of their forthcoming dancing game *Feet Of Fury* this year. The success of *Battlesphere* (a limited edition Jaguar CD game released in 2000 by ScatoLOGIC) in becoming an acclaimed and highly sought-after collectors' item bodes well for the approach. Bivins, for one, is convinced that there is a lot of potential for the retropublishing market. "Classic gaming sections in magazines are getting bigger, there are millions of these old consoles out there and there are at least ten times as many NES consoles as Xboxes out there, and that'll still probably be true in two years time," he argues. "There's definitely a new interest and as time goes on I expect that to increase."

For the moment, however, sales remain unsurprisingly small. Good Deal Games report sales of about 300-400 for SEGA CD games while Songbird reckons it can count on selling at least 100 copies of a new game. MindRec has shifted more than 600 copies of *Implode* although this is mainly to wholesalers.

Similar sales are reported for publishers of Amiga games most of whom see themselves as separate from the rest of the retropublishing scene due to the continuing development of Amiga systems. Although the Amiga had slipped below the mainstream gaming radar by 1997, an active community of hobbyists, developers and publishers continue to produce software for later incarnations of the once-popular computer system. Firms like Hyperion Entertainment and Pagan Games released several games for higher-end Amiga systems and the long-planned release of a new Amiga operating system has kept alive hope of a revival. Hyperion Entertainment, who ported *Quake II* to the Amiga, feel that the arrival of a new Amiga operating system this year marks out the system as one with a future. Ben Hermans, manager of Hyperion (which is part of a consortium of developers currently writing the new Amiga operating system), can see the Amiga going places.

"Contrary to other now defunct platforms there seems to be a future for

©Illustrations by David Rowley, Jamie Trew



ALL NEW!

Protector (above right) for the Jaguar was self-developed by Songbird before the company went looking for discarded Lynx and Jaguar titles.

the Amiga as a niche platform for the current Amiga user base, which is estimated to be around 100,000, and nostalgia buffs," he says. "We hope to see a significant increase in the number of sales once the new hardware and operating system hit the market sometime in the first half of 2003."

But Thomas Schulze, manager of Amiga developers Dreamworlds Development, is less optimistic about the system's fortunes. "We're not exactly sure whether we will continue at all," admits Schulze, who developed Amiga game *Crossfire II*. "The present Amiga market is a bad joke and it's still uncertain whether the new hardware and operating system will change that."

In sharp contrast, Dreamcast retropublisher Cryptic Allusion is highly optimistic about the potential for retropublishing on SEGA's deceased console, especially in light of their free DC Tonic collection of game development tools having been downloaded roughly 30,000 times. "The theme of DC Tonic was as a sort of elixir to revitalise the Dreamcast after SEGA had cancelled it," explains Cryptic Allusion's Dan Potter. "It encouraged recipients to make their own games using the tools which has been very successful in spreadi the word. I think the existence of stores like FuncoLand [an American retro retailer] is proof that the demand is there for this sort of thing."

BT Garner, CEO at MindRec, agrees: "There are other organisations out there releasing commercial games for older console so hopefully this is the start of something and not just a passing fad My guess is that it really all depends how the efforts go. If games continu to be financially viable then they will probably continue to be made."

> "THERE ARE ORGANISATIONS OUT THERE RELEASING COMMERCIAL GAMES FOR OLDER CONSOLES, SO HOPEFULLY THIS IS THE START OF SOMETHING AND NOT JUST A PASSING FAD"

Whether the rise of retropublishing is the start of a new offshoot of retrogaming or just a passing fad is impossible to tell, but five years ago the thought of Spectrum games being used seriously to push the sales of mobile phones was laughable.

But regardless of sales, the chance to live out childhood dreams of writing and publishing games is one that will help fuel the scene for some time yet. As Schu says: "We can't catch up with games that have millions of dollars and dozens of professional workers behind them, but staying on the Amig means getting the attention of thousands rather than being ignored by millions on the PC."

THE INNER CIRCLE

WHO ARE THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS IN THE RETROPUBLISHING SCENE?

CRYPTIC ALLUSION

Having helped kickstart the Dreamcast homebrew scene by compiling a CD of development tools, Cryptic Allusion are now in the final stages of developing dancing-cum-fighting game *Feet Of Fury*.

ETERNITY ENTERTAINMENT

Publishers of Amiga title *Tales Of Tamar* – an email-based strategy game similar to *Civilization*. PC and Linux versions are in the works.

GOOD DEAL GAMES

A leading light on the retropublishing scene and poised to make an even bigger impact once it starts manufacturing new ColecoVision cartridge casings this year. Its alliance with Oldergames and president Michael Thomasson's artwork in Songbird's *Championship Rally Lynx* title underline its importance.

HYPERION ENTERTAINMENT

Developers for niche formats including the Amiga, Hyperion has been porting hit PC titles like *Heretic II* and *Quake II* to Amiga systems for several years. Currently part of a network of developers polishing off a brand new Amiga operating system.

MINDREC COMMUNICATIONS

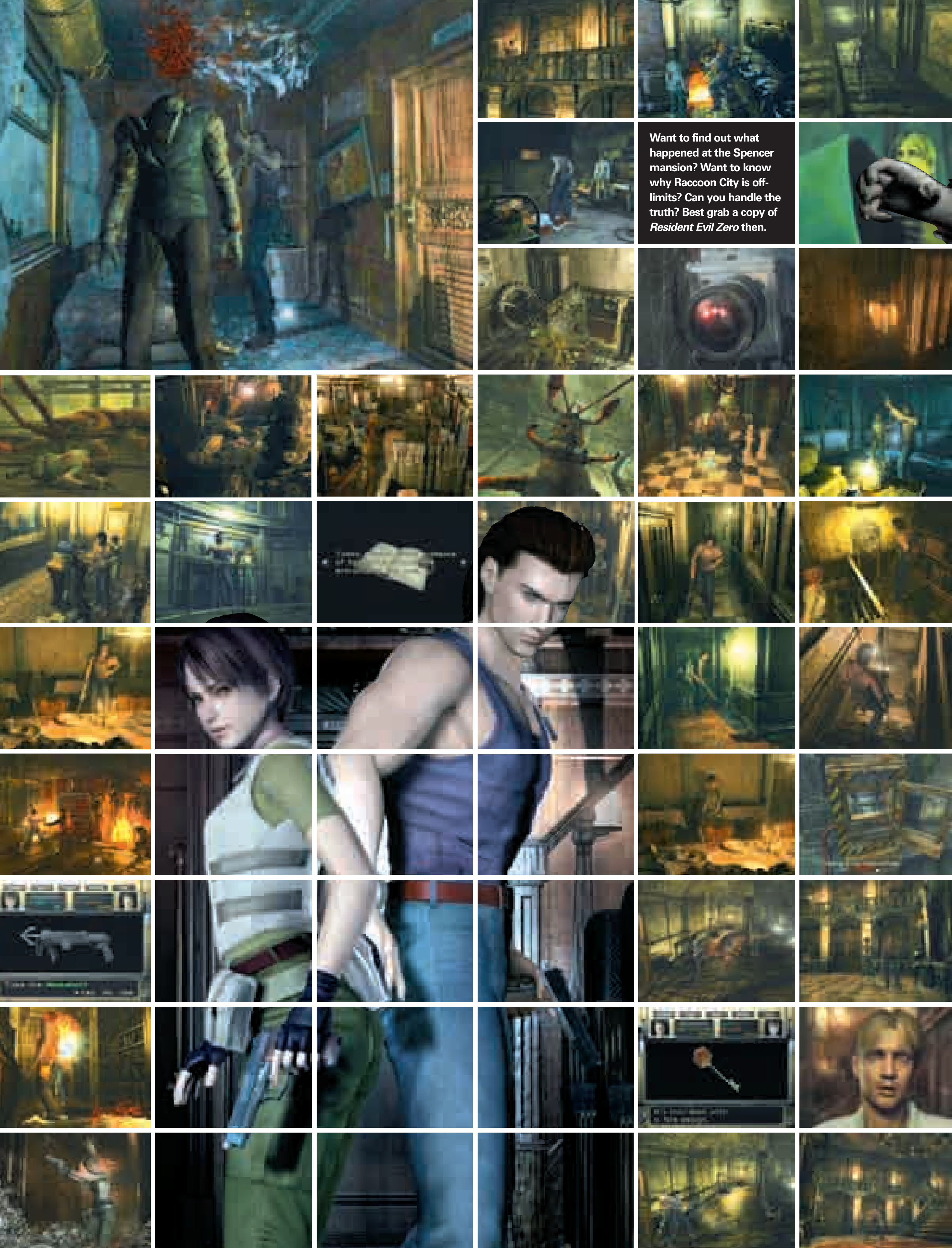
Not-for-profit multimedia firm MindRec is responsible for *Implode* – the first PC Engine Super CD game in years. Currently working on a PC Engine vertical shooter, the firm is also actively looking to publish other new PC Engine games.

OLDERGAMES

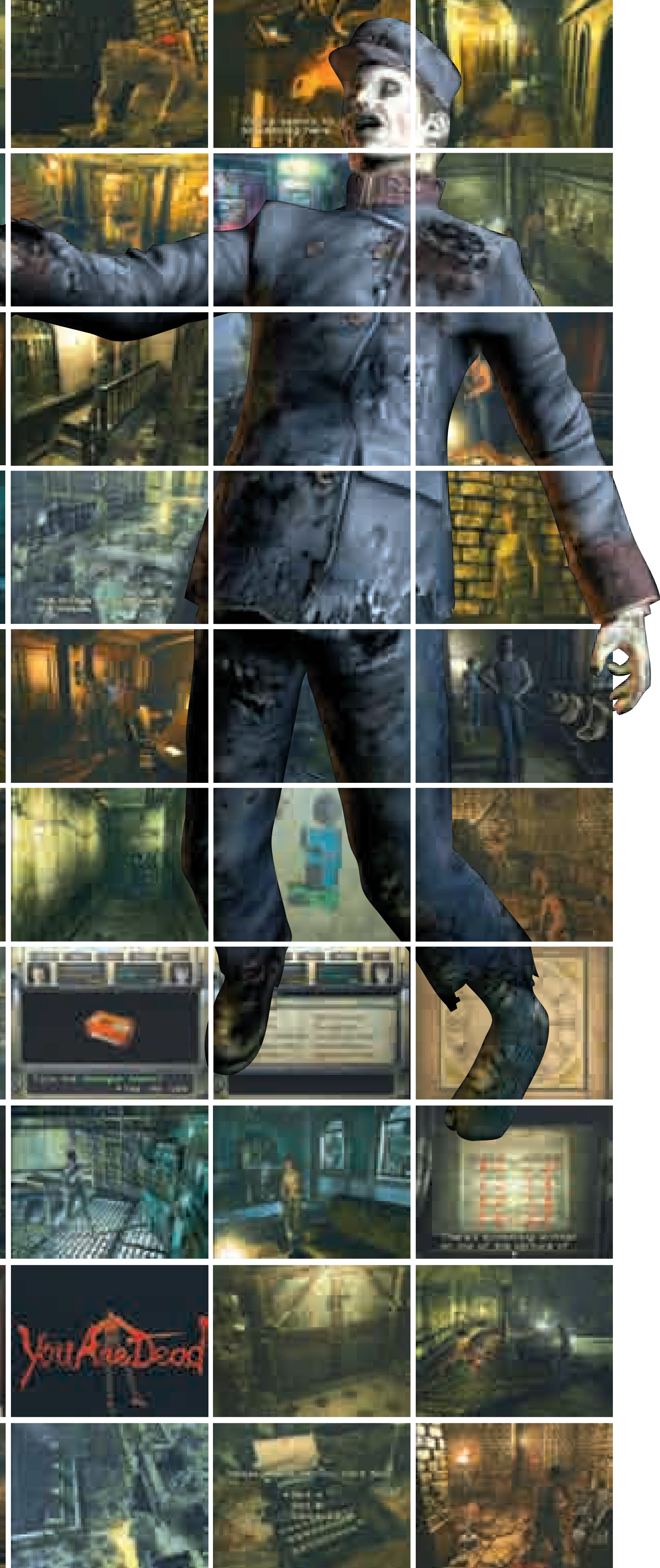
Since its debut release in May, Oldergames has firmly established themselves as one of the key players on the retropublishing scene with a string of CD-i titles and an alliance with Good Deal Games. Upcoming titles such as a NeoGeo CD version of legendary fighting game *Super Fighter* and SEGA CD game *Penn & Teller: Smoke & Mirrors* suggest it's here to stay.

SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS

Retrogaming pioneer whose long line of Atari Jaguar and Atari Lynx games have earned it a special place in the hearts of Atari devotees. Lynx games *Distant Lands* and *Ultravore* are in the pipeline, as is another Jaguar release.



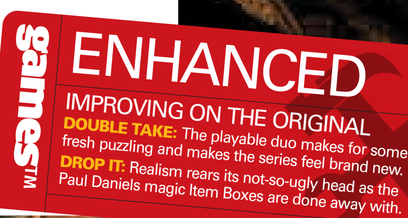
Want to find out what happened at the Spencer mansion? Want to know why Raccoon City is off-limits? Can you handle the truth? Best grab a copy of *Resident Evil Zero* then.



REVIEWS

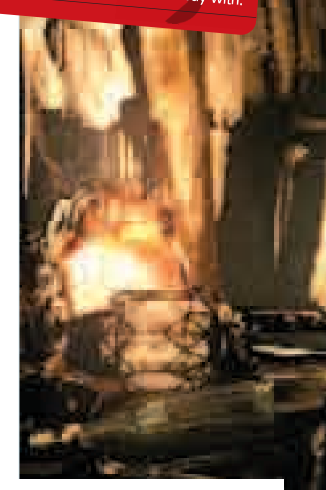
THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games**™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.









AT LONG LAST, WE FINALLY DISCOVER THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
7 March
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Zombies, eh? We've never really rated them… then again, what is there to like about brainless reanimated corpses with all the agility and dexterity of Dame Thora Hird? There's a certain charm to legends like Dracula and werewolves, but short of a few entertaining movie and videogame appearances, the living dead have left us cold. That's not to say that we don't like the *Resident Evil* series, not by a long shot – it's just that the zombies themselves have never been particularly intimidating. The supporting cast of freaks is usually where the shivers begin: the telltale clicks of the Hunter's claws, the distant scuttling of the Tarantula… hell, even those packs of Cerberus dogs have caught us out before. In fact, *Resident Evil* titles have produced more freaks, scares and decapitations than any other games in recent memory and each new title (excluding the disastrous *Gun Survivor* games) manages to take a slightly new angle on the long-running saga.

This latest title takes place before the mansion incident of the original *Resident Evil*, making it the first chapter in the story. As such, it has the unenviable task of tying up countless loose ends left for it by 'later' titles and bringing to light what actually caused the virus outbreak and the contamination of the Spencer mansion and neighbouring Raccoon City. As a series, many constant elements have come under fire as it has aged; of these, the two most common must surely be the static camera and the character-relative controls. Critics will be overjoyed to hear they can whip out their knives once more – these factors have not been altered at all, although this could well be the last dance for said features since *Resident Evil 4* looks set to continue *Code Veronica*'s three-dimensional legacy.

Despite a few enhancements, *Zero* sees no major changes to the tried and tested formula – sinister settings, evil schemes, hideous freaks and more than enough horror clichés to keep George A Romero happy. There are some very cunning features in place to create illusions of a more highly-evolved game; the static or slightly animated pre-rendered backdrops are now much more active, sometimes even scrolling to give the impression that the camera isn't quite as fixed as it really is. Amazingly, this actually works; while it's often apparent that the camera is going nowhere fast, there were times when we became so immersed that we completely forgot about the static viewpoints. In all honesty, it'll be hard for a game to rival this use of pre-rendering – this is as good a use of this technique as we're likely to see from this generation of consoles.

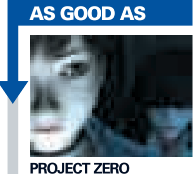
As with the GameCube remake of the original game, the fact that only the characters are rendered in polygons allows for some beautifully

RESIDENT EVIL



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



PROJECT ZERO

FAQs

Q. CO-OPERATIVE PLAY?
Unfortunately not, it remains a single player game.

Q. WHAT IF MY PARTNER DIES?
Game Over as usual. You've got to stay on top of how both are faring.

Q. HOW TRICKY IS IT?
We have no reservations when we say it's the hardest *Resident Evil* yet. Gulp…



"IT'S HARD NOT TO BE IMPRESSED BY THE WAY REBECCA REACTS AND MOVES, OR THE WAY BILLY'S HANDCUFFS AND DOG TAGS SWING REALISTICALLY WITH EVERY STEP"

Softly, softly, catchy zombie… Billy and Rebecca will be kept busy finding enemies to kill.



Is there nowhere evil will not venture? Even public conveniences are no longer safe from the undead threat…



Stamping on a zombie's head is crude but effective. It's also probably quite good exercise (or exorcise, if you prefer).

complex and realistic models. It's hard not to be impressed by the way Rebecca reacts and moves, or by little things like the way Billy's handcuffs and dog tags swing realistically with every step. But several of the more annoying animations return – in terms of gameplay, it's no big deal that characters try to run while pressed against walls but we can't help feeling that modern games, especially those attempting realism such as this, shouldn't have such silly glitches. And it's not as if this is hard to avoid – even in the first *Tomb Raider* game, Ms Croft would put up her hands and stop moving upon contact with a solid surface. Crazy as it may sound, such a small oversight does have a worrying way of almost tarnishing the brilliant atmosphere of the series. Almost…

The change in the direction of the series is also notable. While the first few games relied heavily on sudden jumpy moments to keep up the horror, later titles have placed greater emphasis on paranoia. Suspicious camera angles and worrying sounds are used more to keep the player guessing. As the scene cuts to a view of an abandoned kitchen, you have to wonder why the viewpoint is taken from outside a highly suspicious window. Since this technique has been used repeatedly, it's now often used as a bluff – the 'predictable' moments of terror don't happen where you expect. The subject matter is slowly shifting too, from hordes of wandering zombies to having much more supernatural undertones. As such, the number of moments designed to make the player



Some of the puzzles are worryingly familiar; thankfully though, many others are both brilliant and ingenious.



Subdued lighting helps to keep your nerves on edge and your enemies harder to spot. Keep 'em peeled, Shaw Taylor style.

OFF YOUR CHEST

Long-term *Resident Evil* fans will be familiar with the Item Box phenomenon; thanks to a hole in the space-time continuum (or something), items stored in a chest can be retrieved from any similar chest you find. This bizarre occurrence has featured in every true title in the series and, despite being a bit odd, has been forgiven because it's hard to see how the games would work without it. Amazingly, Capcom has taken another leap forward with *Zero* – in a move hinted at by the GameCube remake's Real Survival mode, items no longer travel untold distances. In fact, the chests themselves are nowhere to be seen. If you want get rid of an item, you have to use it or drop it – but discarded items are usefully recorded on your map. Just count yourself lucky those zombies don't have a brain between them or you could find yourself on the receiving end of your own bullets. Oh, the irony…





A giant scorpion is one of the game's nastiest foes. But at least it's too big to hide in your boot.



Steve Irwin could learn a thing or two about dealing with creepy-crawlies…



Rebecca finds something nasty in the men's toilets. Serves her right for being in there anyway.

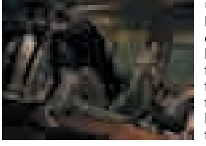
"RESIDENT EVIL ZERO TAKES THE ORIGINAL RESIDENT EVIL VISION TO PLACES IT PREVIOUSLY ONLY DREAMED OF GOING"



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

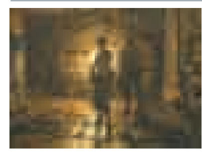
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM...

00:05 MINUTES



No sign of any back-up yet. Starting out with just Rebecca, you'll have to begin exploring the rather sinister train alone. Good luck – you're going to need lots of it.

05:00 HOURS



Switching items and clever use of partner swapping begins to become second nature – Billy should already have saved Rebecca's skin several times by this point.

5 DAYS



The second disc should now be in the GC; Billy and Rebecca switch, move and unite effortlessly. In fact, you should be close to uncovering the whole plot by now…



The job that *DIY SOS* turned down… The locations in this games are suitably creepy and awe-inspiring.



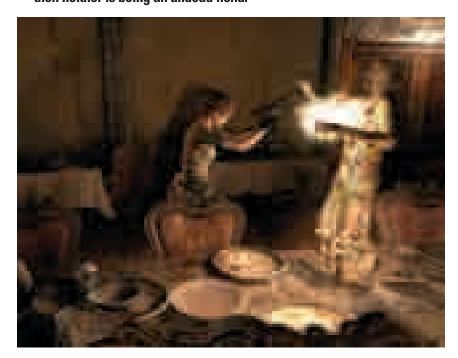
Billy takes care of business, but don't forget you've got to keep Rebecca alive as well.

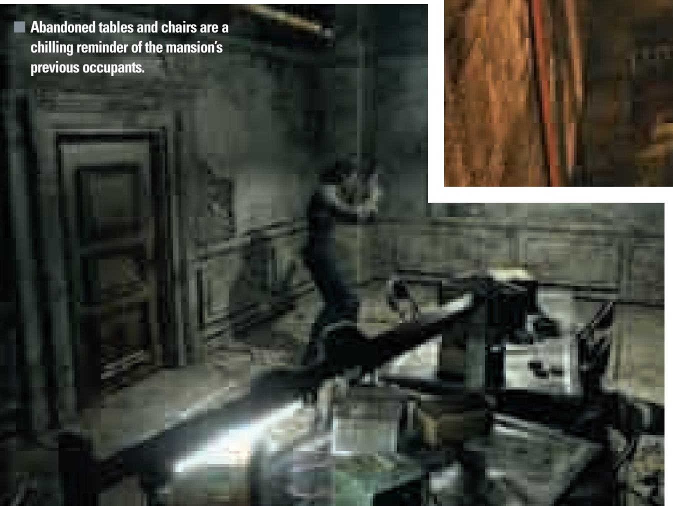
jump have been cut down a little in favour of a more psychological horror, more in the vein of Tecmo's *Project Zero* or the *Silent Hill* series. Playing on fears also takes a large part, with many of the creatures based on typically hated animals such as spiders, snakes and insects. Cheeky yes, but so very effective.

Aside from the Partner Zapping system (which allows you to switch character at any time) and the absence of Item Boxes, core gameplay remains the same as its GameCube predecessor and therefore almost identical to the original seven-year-old PSone title. This is probably the game's biggest flaw – it's as enjoyable to play as any other title in the series but with seven years of gaming evolution behind it, we can't help feel it should be doing a lot more than it is. But this is by far the biggest leap forward for the series and, as the last before *Resident Evil 4*, it pushes the constraints of pre-rendered settings and familiar gameplay to near breaking point. And there's something to be said for familiarity – we were able to jump straight into the game knowing exactly what would be required of us. Just as well really, as Capcom clearly expect this of the player – when the game begins, you're immediately forced to tackle three zombies in a cramped train carriage.

So the familiar layout and gameplay are mixed blessings, but at the end of the day there are far too many excellent additions for this to feel like a tired

Shooting from that close range might not be dinner table etiquette. But then neither is being an undead fiend.





Abandoned tables and chairs are a chilling reminder of the mansion's previous occupants.

We wouldn't have thought there was anything nasty hiding in that furnace, but you can never be too sure…

TWO'S COMPANY

After so many instances of *Resident Evil* protagonists finding themselves alone in the dark, it's a fresh experience to take two switchable characters into the nightmare together. Initially we were worried by the fact that you can only ever have full control of one character yet the game ends when either of them dies. However, despite having only limited control over your team-mate, the whole affair is handled much better than we hoped. Swapping items and equipment is simple and issuing orders to your comrade is a doddle – the Start button splits up or regroups and further options are available via the Inventory screen. Sure, it's not perfect – occasionally you'll die if one character is poorly equipped when they're left alone, but this situation is unavoidable in the context of the game.

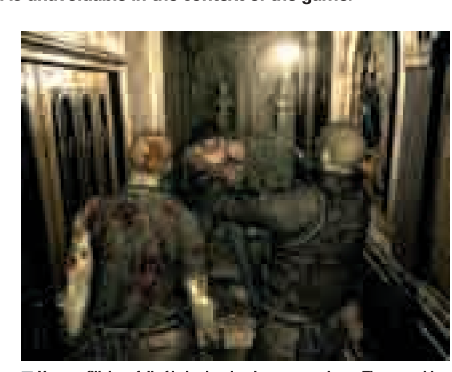
example of the genre. Non-player characters in games have a tendency to be remarkably stupid but we were surprised at just how well the CPU takes care of the partner you're not playing. After setting some basic AI in the menu (two options govern NPC movement and aggression, although movement can be toggled using the Start button), your partner handles situations as well as can be expected, shooting potential threats on sight and covering your back (most of the time). Better still, you're able to take some control over your partner with the , so if you see that they might be about to befall a nasty accident you can quickly guide him or her to safety. Still, keeping both characters alive is no easy task…

There's no two ways about it; *Resident Evil Zero* is the most ambitious and accomplished title in the series to date. *Code Veronica* still remains a firm favourite if only because it hints at bigger and better things coming out of full three-dimensional gaming (i.e. *Resident Evil 4*) but *Zero* takes the original *RE* vision to places it previously only dreamed of going. As we've said, it's not flawless by any means – the nature of the static camera means there are still unseen enemies (although your partner will often pick these off) and it can be quite frustrating having to backtrack to collect an item you thought you were done with. Considering the plot has to go some way towards explaining the happenings of seven separate games (with more to come), it's delivered in an excellent manner and the game has a slightly less linear structure than its predecessors. Of course, requiring certain keys will always limit exploration but there's still a remarkable amount that can be done in, around and between the lines of the essential narrative.

You'll be told we've seen it all before. You'll be told it's just more zombies, guns and evil schemes. You'll be told it still has the same controls and the same rendered backgrounds. And it's all true. But despite our cravings for a fully immersive and creepy 3D world, we've been surprised by *Zero*. Many nice features from previous games find themselves reborn here with excellent results, and the combination may appear overly familiar but look at it like this; *Resident Evil Zero* is, in effect, a greatest hits package. Featuring all the best bits of the series and several new 'tracks' to keep hard-core fans happy, this really is everything that's good about the survival horror genre in one concise collection. Despite a few weaknesses we can't see this being exorcised until Capcom raise the dead again some time next year.



THE LAST HYBRID *RESIDENT EVIL* IS THE BEST YET



You can fill them full of holes but they keep on coming… These zombies are more realistic and resilient than ever.



The Spencer Mansion may have plenty of unnerving portraits but they're not a patch on that Vigo fella out of *Ghostbusters 2*.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Capcom

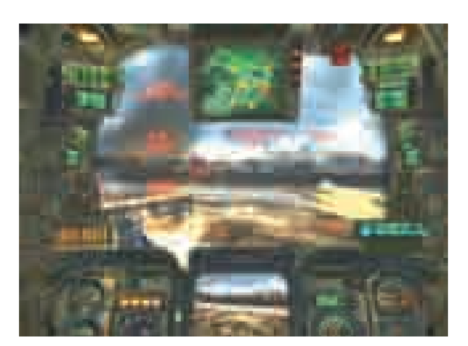
PRICE
£129

RELEASE
March '03 (Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

JUST BECAUSE IT'S BIGGER, DOESN'T MAKE IT BETTER

STEEL BATTALION





games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

REMOTE CONTROL: Not many games come with their own lovely 40-button, four-piece control unit.

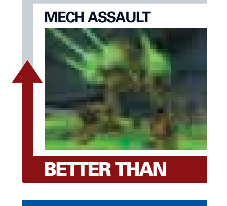
ENJOY THE VIEW: Most mech games have multiple viewpoints, but this title only offers one.

Expensive one-off peripherals – where would we be without them? If some developers hadn't taken the brave step of creating games that used a unique controller, we wouldn't have experienced the joys of *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Samba De Amigo* and virtually every lightgun game under the sun. Of course, most of these games are better suited to the arcade rather than home consoles; after all, you only have to pay a couple of quid to play on a massive arcade cabinet, but buying your own stand-alone controller can set you back a small fortune. That's why it's such a risk for developers to create home system games that require unique controllers – if the game flops, the costs of production won't be recouped and you'll end up making a loss. Still, you try telling that to someone as ambitious and established as Capcom.

As far as gaming experiences go, *Steel Battalion* is one of epic proportions – and that's even before you've managed to get the box open. Coming in packaging bigger than the Xbox itself, it's a struggle just getting the damn thing home. Even unpacking the four-piece joystick and pedal set from the box, putting it all together and actually getting the game going takes a bit of effort – you almost expect someone to come round and do it for you, given the price you paid for it. Once you get started though, things become more straightforward. Choosing your mission, going through the briefing (in which you can work out a strategy via a series of handy maps and diagrams) and picking out a Vertical Tank (VT) is a simple case of moving through the menus in turn. Even choosing your weapons is a piece of cake – as long as you don't overload your VT and get the Max Over warning (or SA Over, which is okay but will make your mech slower), you're all set.

It's not until you actually head into combat that things get a little more tricky. Obviously, you've

MECH ASSAULT

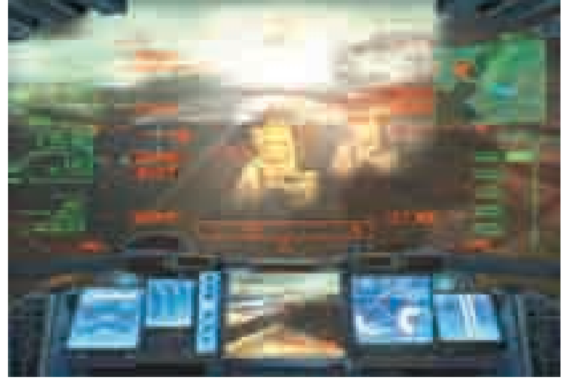


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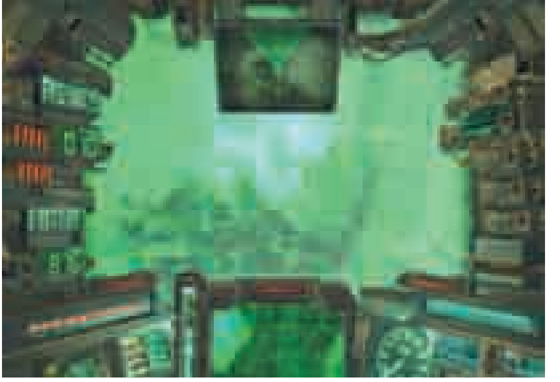
WORSE THAN



PHANTOM CRASH



Conserving ammo is the name of the game, as there isn't much of it. Remember that larger targets will require much more firepower to take them out.



Although you'll want to move around quickly, don't try to take sharp turns while moving at high speed – unless you fancy tipping over onto your side, that is.

FAQs

Q. HOW MUCH?!
Well, massive joystick units don't come cheap – think of it less of a game and more of an investment. Well, sort of.

Q. WON'T I STOP USING IT?
Probably. But there's a sequel already in the works for the game (which will be online, no less) and there's rumoured to be other games coming that'll use the controller as well.

Q. IS THERE MUCH TO IT?
With 23 different campaign missions to conquer and plenty of unlockable VTs and difficulty levels, you're going to be here for a while.



■ Conserving ammo is the name of the game, as there isn't much of it. Remember that larger targets will require much more firepower to take them out.

got to start up your VT – interesting to begin with, slightly tiresome after the first ten or so times – and move into action, but then there are all manner of things to take into consideration besides the enemies ahead. Move too fast and you might tip over when taking sharp corners. Get too gung-ho and you'll run out of ammo. Even running out of fuel becomes an issue if you spend too long on a mission; combine this with the permanent 'in-cockpit' view and multitude of minor tasks your VT can perform (from night vision, sight zoom and even washing the windscreen when it gets dirty) and the illusion that you're actually controlling the mech becomes all the more real.

Of course, the question you've got to ask yourself is no matter how realistic the experience, is the whole package worth nearly £130? After all, any normal person who walked into a videogame store intent on buying something to keep them entertained would most likely balk at the idea of paying that sort of cash for a game that may only last for a few days. On the other hand, considering we've paid £240 for a single Neo-Geo game in the past, it's not all that expensive for such an immersive experience (and a whopping great controller to boot). But then that's the point that needs to be made – playing *Steel Battalion* is all about the experience of playing rather than the actual game itself. If you want to look at it from purely a gameplay perspective, *Steel Battalion* is a slightly shallow and disappointing experience. Falling just short of a point 'n click shoot-'em-up (move towards target, put the cursor over anything that gets in the way to lock-on, pull trigger, repeat until you're out of ammo, complete the mission or blow up), it's not exactly the most pulse-quickening game on the planet. Toss in the fact you're actually driving the VT yourself though – with pedals, joysticks and a multitude of buttons – and the whole thing suddenly becomes much more interesting and similar to the flight simulator you used to see on *The Krypton Factor* rather than just a game.

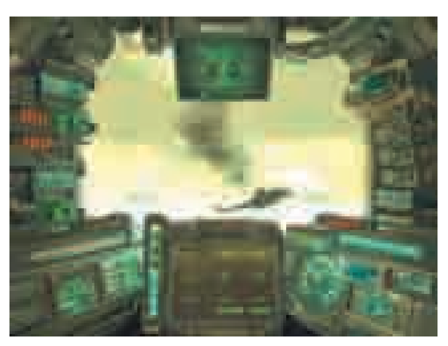
Ultimately, you're paying for the controller more than anything, but unless you're a truly hard-core fan with more money than sense it doesn't hide the fact that the gameplay isn't that inspiring. Yes, the thought of owning such an huge set-up is rather pleasing, but take that away and what you're left with probably isn't so awe-inspiring. If it was on the shelves *sans* controller for £40, *Steel Battalion* would be decidedly average. As it is, it's still average – but at least your friends will be jealous of you for owning it.



AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER… FOR A PRICE



■ Obviously, the idea is not to get hit. If you do, you won't be able to see and eventually you'll have to eject before your VT blows up with you in it.



■ It's not just other mechs that you've got to keep your eye on – watching out for enemy helicopters and ground vehicles is just as important.

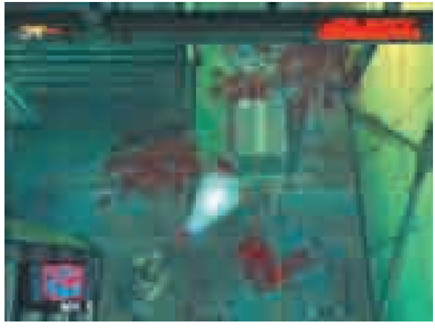
FORWARD PLANNING

As is the case with a real conflict, it's not just on the battlefield that the war is won – you've got to plan everything in advance before you can wade in, mech-ankle deep in the mud. Before each scenario, you'll get the chance to work out your battle plan through the mission briefing screen; this will give you an idea of where the opposing forces will be coming from and the priority of your objectives. There's also a map on display that can be used to work out which direction you should be heading in to complete your mission in the most effective time. Once you've worked out your strategy, you also need to deck out your VT with the right weaponry – too much and you'll be too heavy to fight, too little and you won't stand a chance against the enemy. It's all about making the right choices…





The round-the-corner peek is now de rigueur for stealth-'em-up fans. Remember, it could save your life (probably not your real life, mind).



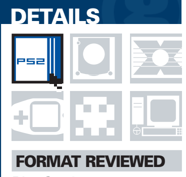
If in doubt, shoot everything – even an apparently innocuous cardboard box could contain some life-threatening item.



Perform well in the *VR Missions* and you'll get to use the alternative characters such as Ninja Raiden.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

DEAD TO RIGHTS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



METAL GEAR SOLID INTEGRAL

VIDEOGAMING MARMITE IT MAY BE, BUT HOW DOES RAIDEN AND SNAKE'S ADVENTURE FARE AS IT GOES MULTIFORMAT?

METAL GEAR SOLID

To all intents and purposes, this could have been an add-on disc. *Metal Gear Solid: Special Missions* on PSone proved that such a feat was possible and this second batch of added extras would surely have been the perfect chance to reprise that technology. The multiformat release is probably the main reason we see a whole new version with these extra features. Snake and pals have been out of the limelight for some time now and with young upstarts like Sam Fisher looking to steal the stealth crown, Konami had no choice but to make a big thing of this update. When we heard about all the extra goodies that had been thrown into the package, we just had to get in on some *Substance* action. Since we're among the honest few who can unashamedly admit to having thoroughly enjoyed the original *MGS2*, we decided to go back and spend a little quality time with Raiden and Snake.

Sneaking up behind a guard, we draw a pistol to his head and he raises his arms. Circling round to the front, we point our loaded firearm at the terrorist's head only to have him play the hero and spout tough-guy trash about how he isn't scared of us. This would never do. Quickly switching weapons, we soon find that not only does the Stinger missile launcher quickly shut him up but also scares the bejesus out of him too – a point proved by the damp patch that mysteriously appears around the his lower regions. Class. It's moments like these that restore your faith in a game that has come under such heavy fire that it actually causes you to doubt your own opinions of it. Did we really enjoy it? As we hide the concussed body of the somewhat embarrassed guard in a cramped locker, we come to the conclusion that we most certainly did.

We must admit that we were fairly surprised that *MGS2* still looks as good as it did when it first emerged. All the original praise is still due today, although the same can be said of all the criticism too. A lot of the areas in the Plant can look particularly bland at times, but such is the nature of a facility of this sort – you can't really pin that much blame on Konami for not putting an amusement park on the Big Shell. Audio is equally impressive as hapless guards call for back-up or chat to one another, utterly oblivious to your very existence. The plot is fairly strong, walking the fine line

FAQs

Q. CAN YOU PLAY AS SNAKE THROUGHOUT?
Not exactly, but the five *Snake Tales* mini-adventures let you see the story from a rather different point of view.

Q. CAN I GO SKATEBOARDING?
Contrary to popular belief, you really can bust out some phat tricks as Solid Snake in the Extreme Sports mode, exclusive to the PlayStation2 version.

Q. CUT-SCENE BOREDOM?
That depends on your outlook. If you mean 'Is it as movie-heavy as *MGS2*?' then yes, it most certainly is.



■ The M9 knocks out guards rather than killing them, but what fun is that? 'Cause when they wake up you'll only have to do it again… and again.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
VIRTUALLY THERE: The *VR Missions* are almost a game in their own right... almost.
JACKANORY: *MGS2*'s plot easily outclasses the competition – many games don't bother trying.

2: SUBSTANCE

between 'woefully linear' and 'maintaining a structured narrative' but mostly falling on the safe side. In its favour, the storyline is one of *Metal Gear*'s trump cards – as the market fills with more and more tactical shooters with faceless sneakers cracking down on terrorism, it's a welcome relief to have this more personal (and more Japanese, for that matter) take on the genre.

Yes, we agree that there are too many cut-scenes and yes, we'd have liked to have been playing a little more of the time. But the thing most people seem to overlook is that when you are in control, the game is a joy. The mechanics in places are nothing short of beautiful – the feeling of satisfaction as you knock out a guard as he's distracted by a well-placed magazine is unmistakable. Some of the boss fights, too, are stupendous – we're still as impressed by Fortune's super-destructive rail gun as we ever were, and most of the other face-offs maintain a similar allure. It's pretty hard not to be bowled over by the attention to detail for the most part. We've wasted so many minutes popping off seagulls with the sniper rifle or confusing guards with the oh-so-amusing Stealth device that there must be something to be said for the little nuances that litter Solid Snake's world.

No big game is ever without its critics. And why should it be? By the same virtue that not everyone will enjoy jumping around colourful levels as a plumber or controlling a cat sucking up time with a vacuum cleaner, sneaking your way through an interactive movie is not going to interest everybody. We can even see why it came under the amount of fire it did – after such hype, no game could have successfully lived up to it. Dubbing it an 'interactive movie' probably wasn't far from the mark and while we'll join the ranks that campaign for more playing and less watching, at the same time we did very much enjoy *Substance*. PS2 owners who've already seen it through will probably want to throw their cash elsewhere but everyone else (particularly Xbox owners looking for a suitably different alternative to *Splinter Cell*) could do a whole lot worse than look into *MGS2:S*. A word of warning, though; if you do get into it, you'll still be unlocking extras several months down the line…

WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT?

The amount of extra stuff that's been packed into *Substance* is really quite impressive. Even for a seasoned *MGS* veteran, there's plenty to do by way of *VR Missions* and *Snake Tales*. Anyone who saw the *Special Missions* expansion for *MGS* on PSone will know exactly what to expect – dropped into certain situations with limited health and ammo, you must fulfil your given task within a strict time limit. While excellent practice for many of the main game's events, the *VR Missions* are also a great way to while away a few hours without even noticing. *Snake Tales* is an entirely different affair, pitting much-missed hero Solid Snake against some rather strange foes as we find out what he was up to while Raiden was running around the Big Shell.



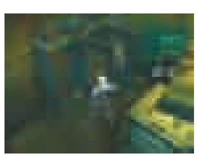


■ PS2 and PC owners get a great boss battle – Xbox owners get a one-way trip to Slowdown Central.

PC £29.99 OUT NOW

Unless you've got a decent controller, don't even think about it – this isn't a mouse-and-keyboard game. And don't expect an experience to shame the console versions.

XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



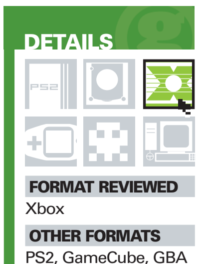
Since the early rain effects were coded for the PS2, the Xbox version slows down whenever these are used. We also found the controller to be far less suited to the game.

VERDICT 7/10
SNEAKS PAST MGS2 BUT NOT WORTH BUYING AGAIN

THE BEST MORTAL KOMBAT GAME FOR AGES. BUT THAT'S NOT QUITE ENOUGH ANY MORE

MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Ah, memories. We seem to remember that back when John Major was Prime Minister, when most of the Royal Family were getting divorced and Take That were actually popular (God knows why), the burning gaming question of the day wasn't about which console you owned as it is for casual gamers today. Instead, the one thing dividing people more than anything was a simple choice that caused arguments all over the place: *Street Fighter II* or *Mortal Kombat*? It might sound rather trivial, arguing over two games in the same genre (although the same could be said about the 'my console's better than yours' squabbles of today), but being either a Fighter or a Kombatant determined what kind of gamer you really were, apparently. To be frank, we quite liked both for their own individual traits – even if that did make us the most adamant of fence sitters.

Of course, the rise of the *Street Fighter* series and the rollercoaster-style descent of *Mortal Kombat* (following the damn fine *MKII*) meant that all those arguments were laid to rest – until someone decided to do something about the fact that the whole *Mortal Kombat* series had gone to pot, that is. Yes, the advent of the next-generation console has given Midway the opportunity to take its once-respected beat-'em-up back to the drawing board and redefine what the game is all about. The result? Probably the best *Mortal Kombat* game for a very long time. Although given past efforts, that's not exactly much of an accolade.

We shouldn't get too bogged down in how crap most of the other games have been when talking about this latest instalment of the *MK* series though. After all, *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* is meant to be the start of an new era for the series and, to be fair, it's a pretty good effort at trying to reinvent a franchise that's played on only a few traits – blood, digitised characters and, er, more blood – for its whole life. Unfortunately, the problem with the beat-'em-up genre these days is that all the games are slowly bleeding into one another (no pun intended) and the key features that were once unique to each title are being pilfered across the board. Want realism? Then get *Virtua Fighter*. Combos? *Tekken*. Weapons? *Soul Calibur*. Now it seems that every game has every feature – making the genre rather samey.

And that's the biggest problem with *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* – while it's certainly a massive improvement over most of the games before it, it doesn't feel like anything we haven't played several times over already. Some of the leaps forward that the game takes are incredibly impressive when compared to previous *MK* instalments – for example, the highly-detailed character designs look lovely against the polygon-plagued models of *MK4* – but aren't any nicer to

FAQs

Q. NEW CHARACTERS?
Plenty. *MK:DA* is more than just a rehash of familiar faces, with a total of nine new characters to unlock and choose from.

Q. WHAT'S KONQUEST MODE?
Not what we hoped for. While we expected a *Soul Calibur*-style quest across the land (fighting people along the way), it is in fact just a rather crap series of training sessions for each fighter. Bah.

Q. MORE FATALITIES?
Unfortunately not. While we're happy to lose the Friendships and Animalities, the fact that there are no Stage deaths and only one Fatality per fighter is a bit of a letdown.

MORTAL KOMBAT 4



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

SOUL CALIBUR



■ The new Ready Brek commercials got a mixed response…



■ The introduction of some bad-ass weapons means there's even more gore this time.



ENHANCED

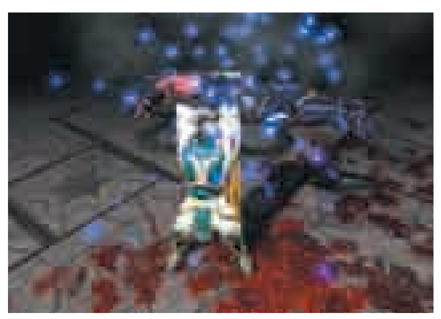
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ARTY: Instead of digitised images of real people, *MK:DA* features impressively rendered characters.

STYLE FILE: The different fighting styles for each character mean more diverse Kombatants to choose.

ABOVE: Johnny Cage fights himself in the sort of gloriously narcissistic display you'd expect from a man in personalized lycra.

BELOW: Why do these oafs insist on fighting in Buddhist monasteries? Have they no respect? Get a haircut! National Service! Harrumph!





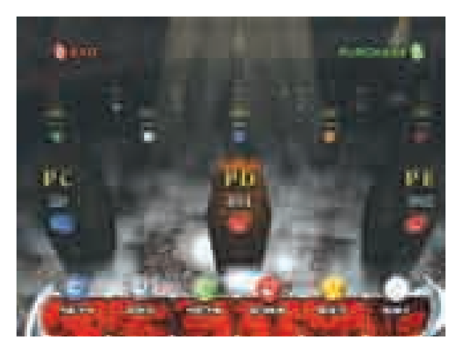
look at than what we've come to expect since playing *Virtua Fighter 4*, *Tekken 4* or even *Soul Calibur* on the Dreamcast. The shift away from having cookie-cutter fighters all using exactly the same moves is also welcome. Indeed, the fact that each character has three different fighting styles (including a weapon-based one that causes more than its fair share of blood) means that mastering all the fighters in the game takes more than just being able to memorise a small handful of moves.

However, the actual combat system feels overly rigid at times, and while the ability to change styles helps keep your opponent on their toes it often feels like every fight is just a case of who can remember the timing pauses of each attack, blocking constantly until they appear and then unleashing a barrage of their own. Even worse is the incredibly forced combo system that the game pushes you into. With each character having their own collection of chain moves set in stone, it's practically impossible to come up with your own combos – and when you try, your fighter just ends up leaving himself wide open for attacks thanks to the varied timing on each move. The *Tekken* series might have featured set combo strings, but even that gave you the opportunity to experiment with your own; this is just too rigid for its own good.

That's not to say that *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* is a terrible example of a beat-'em-up – we certainly had more than a few laughs kicking the living daylights out of each other on it, before ripping out more than enough spines to keep us grinning from ear to ear. It's just that by using elements made popular by other fighting games to bring itself up to speed with the rest of the pack, Midway has created a game that has nothing particularly special over the competition. Considering how packed the genre is right now, only that special something will be good enough – and it isn't here.

TALES FROM THE KRYPT

The *Mortal Kombat* series has always been chock full of hidden goodies – from the 'Toasty!' man and hidden characters to the undisclosed method of performing the fatality moves – but *Deadly Alliance* takes it to a whole new level. Rather than scattering a number of secrets throughout the game, they're all gathered together in an area called The Krypt (yes, another misused K). By playing through the game in either Arcade or Konquest mode, you can earn different kinds of Kombat Koins (sigh) which can then be used to buy the secrets from the Krypt. This kurrency (jeez…) comes in six varieties and each secret costs a different amount of a different Koin. The higher the value, the better the secret (perhaps). In any case though, you're going to have your work cut out if you want to unlock them all. With 676 secrets in total on offer, that's a whole lot of koins to, er, kollect… bugger.

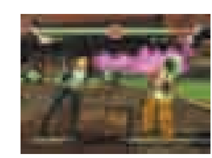


GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



Unsurprisingly, the GC version looks just as nice in terms of graphics and animation. But the 'not built for a beat-'em-up' controller makes the game a bit difficult to handle.

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Although it looks the worst (but only just), the PS2 version has the benefit of having the best pad – whether you prefer graphics over a decent controller is really your call.

GBA £29.99 OUT NOW



It's no *SF Alpha 3* but if you want a handheld fighter that's fast, fun and gory, this is it. We're impressed with how well this turned out – but why couldn't they just port *MKII*, eh?

VERDICT 6/10

GOOD FUN, BUT NOTHING TO SET THE WORLD ALIGHT

FINGERPRINT

gamesTM

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BIG BADDIES: Every boss from *House Of The Dead 2* is back for you to defeat with your ball.

SOUNDS GOOD: The tiny GBA speaker can barely keep up with the brilliant speech, music and effects.



Kill the zombies that are wandering around the table in order to advance the clock and rack up that multiplier. Just a shame there aren't more modes or tables to practice on. You could always try playing real pinball, of course – but there's no zombies. Pinball or zombies? Hmm…



Damn, we're good. Some of the Mystery bonuses will help you make an impact on the high score table.



The bumpers on this table are replaced with worms, complete with writhing action when hit. Nice.

PINBALL OF THE DEAD

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK IN THE GRAVEYARD, LOOK WHAT'S LURKING BEHIND THE FLIPPERS…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
WOW Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Yes, you read right. Pinball. Of the dead. Really. You've shot them to pieces, even typed them to death, but as we all know, the only way to truly despatch the undead is via the ancient ritual of pinball. Or something. Whatever the crazy idea behind it, SEGA once again shirks the usual and laughs in the face of normality with another bizarre blend of concepts. Mixing aliens with funk was original, splicing monkeys with balls was nothing short of genius, so we really should have learned to expect the unexpected by now. This meeting of silver balls and living dead will undoubtedly find its way into numerous homes on the merit of its heritage alone, but is there a place for a pinball game in the *…Of The Dead* legacy? After typing long words became an offensive weapon, it seems anything goes…

After a polished intro comprising clips from *The House Of The Dead 2*, it's difficult not to be somewhat disappointed by the fact that there are only two play modes and three tables. All three are fairly large and scroll up a fair way (three sets of flippers adorn most playfields, among the various other bumpers, hazards and, er, zombies) and to their credit, they're very easy on the eye. On top of what you see to begin with, performing certain pinballing tasks opens up new areas, several of which pit you against a succession of the bosses from the classic Dreamcast shooter. These battles have made the leap from trigger-finger precision to multi-ball mayhem really quite well, and while aiming for a weak point might be a thing of the past, the action is no less fun or frantic for it.

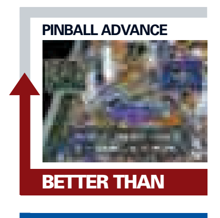
Short of the lack of play areas (a real shame, although a few extra modes and areas are made available after extended play), there's very little to fault with *Pinball Of The Dead*. The flashy visuals rival the best part of the Game Boy catalogue while the sound is of particular note. Having expected blippy tunes and ropey effects, we're rewarded with exactly the opposite – every moan, ping and squelch is as good as anything else we've heard come out of the tiny handheld and the music and speech are of an equally high standard. Being a pinball game, it's intended for 'little and often' play – give it just that and you should still be tilting the zombies away in six months time.



VERDICT 7/10

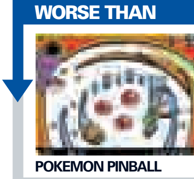
SPARSE TABLE SELECTION MARS AN ENJOYABLE GAME

BETTER THAN

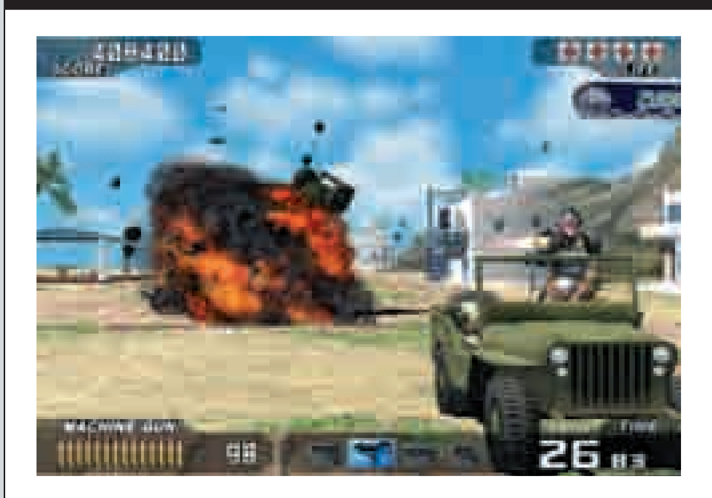


PINBALL ADVANCE

WORSE THAN



POKEMON PINBALL





games™

ENHANCED

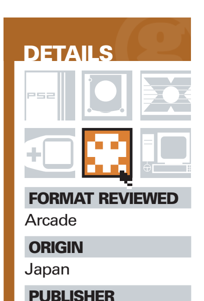
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPONS: The new Weapon Select option adds a lot more strategy to the game – rather than just firing your gun, it's a case of making sure you've got the right weapon at the right time.

TIME CRISIS 3

PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL WITH NAMCO'S LATEST SHOOTER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

When it comes to sequels to arcade games, as opposed to home console ones, it's a lot easier for developers to get away with releasing near-identical follow-ups. Arcade gamers don't seem to mind coughing up a couple of quid as long as they get some fun in the short-term, and it also means the games can capture the magic of the original title if it was a success first time around. Take *Time Crisis 3*, for instance – rather than making massive changes to the overall structure of the last instalment of the series, Namco has had the sense to keep things pretty much as they were. In fact, aside from some slight graphical touch-ups and some different settings for each level, everything's almost identical to the way it was last time around.

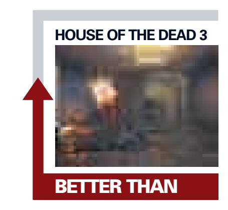
Of course, we say 'almost' because there is one small but interesting addition that brings a bit of strategy to the proceedings; the ability to choose which weapon to use. As well as keeping your basic handgun (with limitless ammo) as standard, there are three other weapons available – a machine gun, a shotgun and a grenade launcher. Ammo for each of these weapons is limited, although it can be recouped by shooting particular enemies during play; the same yellow-clad enemies that once gave you additional time for your clock. Changing the weapon is simply a matter of releasing the pedal to hide your character and then pulling the trigger until you've got the one you want – easy. Of course, you'll need to make sure you save the bigger weapons for situations when you really need them…

That fact that *Time Crisis 3* features exactly the same style of gameplay as the previous outing isn't really a problem. Being an arcade game (and only £1 per play) it's still fun for a quick blast, especially if you're playing with a friend – but we doubt we'd say the same thing if this was a £40 PS2 title. As it stands, *Time Crisis 3* is a good laugh even if it isn't very different from *Time Crisis 2*; the loss of focus on the time limit might take it away from the original game's roots and lose some of the unique flavour the series once had, but it's still worth a play all the same.

VERDICT 7/10

GREAT CO-OP FUN, BUT NOTHING REVOLUTIONARY

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 3



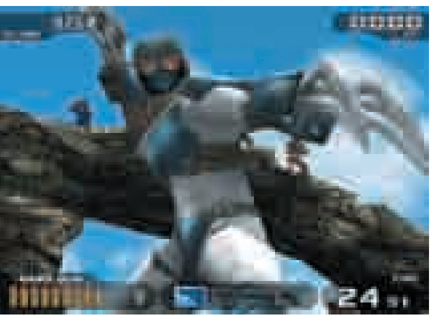
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

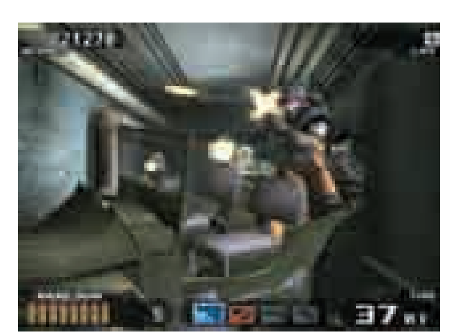


TIME CRISIS 2

Much like in the last game, your partner will often appear in front of you and make precise aiming a necessity.



Ooh, what big sharp claws you've got – all the better to scratch us with, yes? Well, have some hot lead on us. Bang.



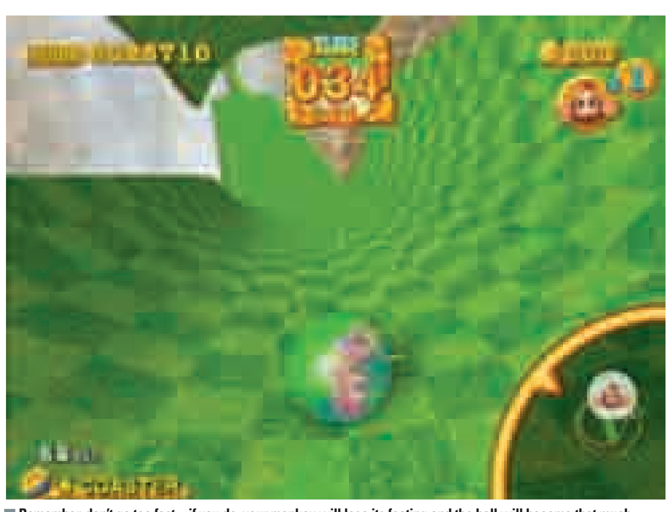
Some enemies now have life bars, meaning that you'll need to pummel them with bullets before they go down.

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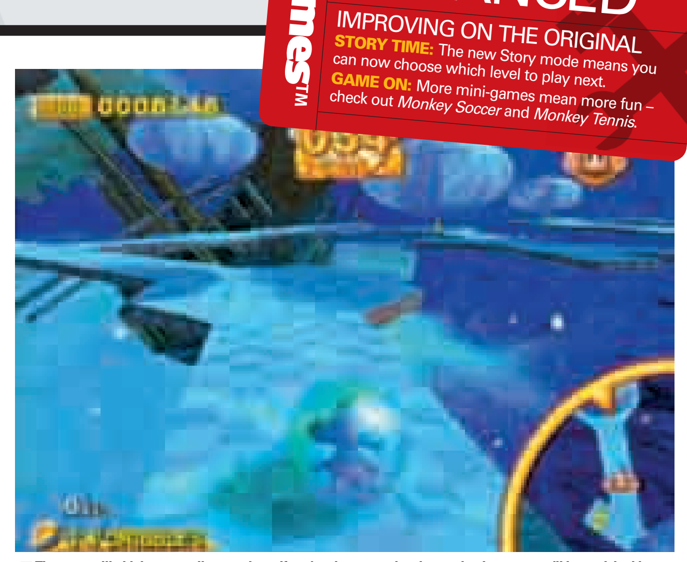
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

STORY TIME: The new Story mode means you can now choose which level to play next.

GAME ON: More mini-games mean more fun – check out *Monkey Soccer* and *Monkey Tennis*.



Remember, don't go too fast – if you do, your monkey will lose its footing and the ball will become that much harder to control.



These metallic blobs are really annoying – if you're slow enough to let one land on you, you'll be squished into a monkey pancake. Mmm, pancake.

WHOEVER SAID THAT SEQUELS HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THE ORIGINAL?

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

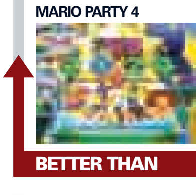
DEVELOPER
Amusement Vision

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
March '03 (Japan/US: Out Now)

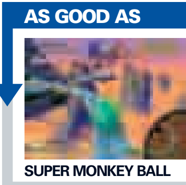
PLAYERS
1-4

MARIO PARTY 4



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

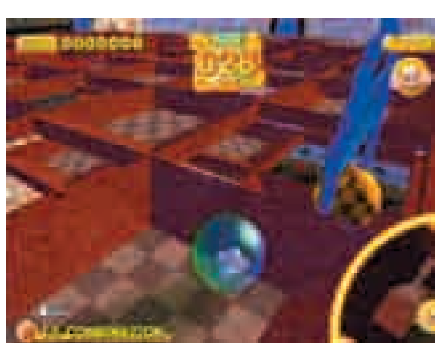


SUPER MONKEY BALL

These days, there are several unwritten rules that most of us understand. You know – the art of queuing, ending a night on the town with a kebab or failing miserably as a country to do well at any of the sports we invented. Of course, the biggest unwritten rule of all is that if something's got monkeys in it then it'll be great, end of story. Take *Monkey*, the Japanese TV show, for instance – that was ace. Or *Planet Of The Apes* (the original, not the rubbish remake) – a blinding movie if ever there was one. And it's not just TV and film that the rule applies to – there are plenty of great monkey-related videogames too.

Of all the simian-starring games out there though, a special mention has to go to *Super Monkey Ball* – SEGA's very first console game on a platform not made by the Japanese giant itself and a damn fine game to boot. Sure, so it stole practically every idea that *Marble Madness* first offered us back in 1984 and wasn't quite the 'original' game that many people declared it to be… but hey, it had monkeys in it. Monkeys in balls. With shorts on. Admittedly, it took up far too much of our time (especially seeing as it eclipsed everything that Nintendo had to offer at the launch of the GameCube) but eventually all games get put to one side in favour of the next big thing. Until they have a sequel featuring even more of the same, that is…

Considering how well the original did last year, it's no great surprise that *Super Monkey Ball 2* has rolled around so quickly (no pun intended). What's even less of a surprise is how little the formula has changed since the last time we encountered AiAi and his simian friends. Usually, sequels require some kind of clever twist on the original to warrant a follow-up (add your own snide comment about the *FIFA* series), but there isn't really much you can do with a concept that



Just because you're next to the goal gate doesn't mean you won't mess up before you go through it; it's the frustration that makes the game fun.



The harder-to-reach goal gates will move you through the levels more quickly – which is probably why they're tougher to get to.

FAQs

Q. MORE OF THE SAME?
With only a slight upgrade, yes. But that's never going to be a bad thing considering the original game was so much fun.

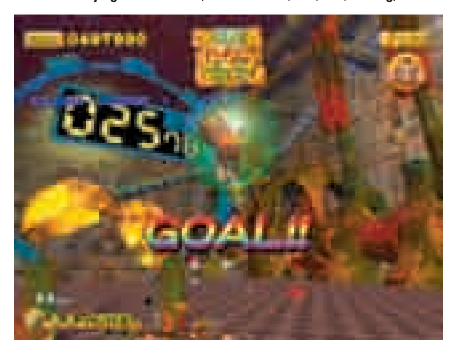
Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
With all skill levels, extra stages, bonus levels and the dreaded Master difficulty, we count 149 different stages.

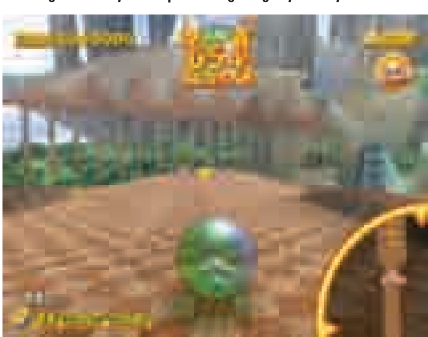
Q. WHO'S DR BADBOON?
The evil 'genius' who's stolen all the world's bananas, with the intention of making them taste of curry unless Meemee marries him. You know, that classic tale…



■ ABOVE: You'll need some nifty stick-twiddling to get through here, or this monkey's gone to heaven (name the band, win, erm, nothing).

■ BELOW: Don't be fooled by the expanse of track in front of you – one wrong move and you'll be plummeting to a grisly monkey death.

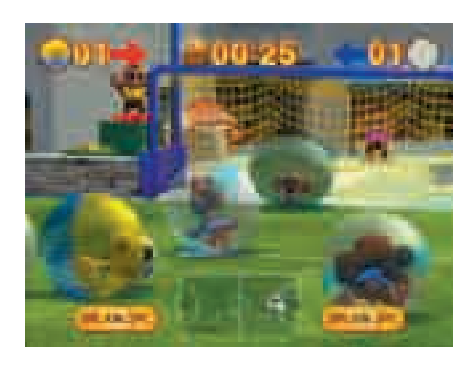




boils down to balancing a ball on a platform. As such, SEGA has done the next best thing and piled on even more stages and modes than before, rather than trying to enhance the already nice-but-functional graphics or fiddle with the gameplay too much. Additions such as the all-new Story mode – which tells the tale of the evil Dr Badboon across ten worlds that each have ten stages – offer something new over Challenge mode, while the inclusion of six new mini-games is more than enough to keep multiplayer gatherings interesting.

While you can't tell at first glance, there has been a subtle change to the logic behind *Super Monkey Ball 2*'s stages that'll please some people and annoy others. The hook that made the original game so darn playable was that it was patience, skill and dexterity that won the day; the satisfaction of completing a particularly tricky stage was more than enough to counterbalance the frustration of seeing your monkey plummet to its doom for the millionth time. The simple concept of having to 'balance' the ball through each level was easy to pick up and devilishly nasty when it came to the latter stages, but none of the levels were ever impossible. What's more, the physics of the whole game were so accurate you could be sure that every time you watched the ball topple off the edge into the abyss, it really was your fault – it wasn't the game screwing you out of success, it was just that you weren't good enough or you lost your bottle because the clock was running out fast. This time around though, the levels swing between two extremes – puzzle-based ones (where you have to work out how to even reach the goal before you can attempt to do so) and sheer trial and error that'll have you 'falling out' time and time again before you manage to reach the goal by sheer fluke. While this style certainly works for the Story mode when you can try stages again and again without being penalised, we can't help but feel that some may think the game has lost some of the skilful edge that made it so appealing in the first place. After all, Challenge mode just wouldn't be the same if getting through some of the levels required more luck than judgement.

That said though, these stages are in the minority considering how many levels there are in the entire game. The tried-and-tested formula has remained largely intact, and by combining it with the new content, *Super Monkey Ball 2* remains as good a game as the original was less than a year ago, if not better. Certainly, it's more of an upgrade than a full-blown sequel but that doesn't make it any less great. In fact, it's well worth a purchase even if you're still plugging through the first one.



MONKEY SEE, MONKEY PARTY

With room for up to four people to monkey around at once, it's fair to say that the mini-games in the original *Super Monkey Ball* were what kept us most amused once we'd got well and truly stuck in Challenge mode. Who could resist bowling, golfing or even flying with monkeys? Which is why we're pleased that the games make a reappearance in the sequel. Of course, it wouldn't be enough for SEGA to just bring them all over as they were without making some improvements – oh lordy, no. Instead, each of the old games has been given an overhaul to make them better while there are also six totally new games to play. With delights such as *Monkey Tennis, Monkey Baseball, Monkey Dogfight* and (best of all) *Monkey Soccer* to keep us busy now, we can't see us ever getting bored…



■ And we always thought it was 'piff, paff, poff'. Honestly, where's The Great Soprendo when you need him? Dictionary corner, apparently.



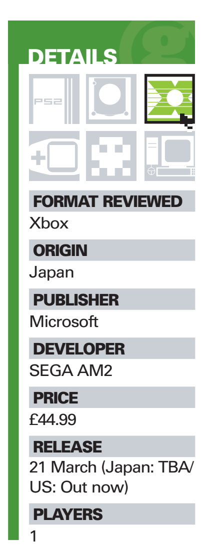
■ Choosing which level you play next in Story mode means that if you really get stuck on a frustrating stage, you can come back to it later.


VERDICT 8/10
YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY MONKEYS

HAS AM2 USED THE POWER OF XBOX, OR IS THIS JUST A LAZY DREAMCAST PORT?

SHENMUE II

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
SEGA AM2

PRICE
£44.99

RELEASE
21 March (Japan: TBA/ US: Out now)

PLAYERS
1

Microsoft needed exclusive games for Xbox – that was a basic factor when the company first unveiled its plans to enter the console market. But even with its seemingly bottomless moneybox, many were surprised when the company revealed that *Shenmue II* would be coming exclusively to Xbox (in the US, at least), thanks to a deal struck with SEGA. The game was one of the final key releases planned for Dreamcast and was the sole reason that many gamers were still holding onto the dying SEGA console. Unsurprisingly, many American gamers weren't at all happy when the title was cancelled, though others were intrigued at the thought of the already great-looking title being souped-up on a more powerful platform.

But despite so much opportunity for improved visuals, *Shenmue II* comes to Xbox in a form that's almost indistinguishable from the Dreamcast version. A few of the slightly rougher textures have been replaced with subtly filtered alternatives and a few more polygons have been used on some of the more angular characters, but few will notice the enhancements. More noticeable, however, is a totally re-recorded script featuring the dodgy American voice actors heard in the original game. Sadly, the more authentic Japanese recording used in the Dreamcast version isn't available here. In spite of the missed opportunity, Xbox *Shenmue II* is still a great game.

The story follows on from the original game in which Ryo (the main character) leaves for Hong Kong in hot pursuit of his father's killer. In this game, Ryo reaches his destination and, being away from home for the first time, learns about city life the hard way. Once again, a number of different genres are featured, including RPG, adventure, puzzle, fighting and quick-time event rhythm/action sections – each realised to a good standard. But where *Shenmue II* really succeeds is with a great storyline that provides an almighty climax to this instalment in the series. Many of the mysteries and questions raised in the first chapter are concluded, though there are significant openings for a third game. In fact, Yu Suzuki (creator of the series) has recently suggested that the third game may well be in production, though nothing has been officially confirmed so far.

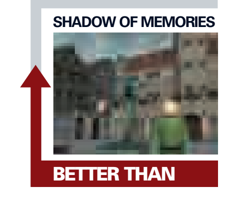
The big question here, of course, is whether *Shenmue II* is worth buying. Well, if you've already played through the Dreamcast version, then no – there's virtually nothing on offer here that you haven't already seen. If, however, you haven't played the game before, then it's something we heartily recommend. For £40, *Shenmue II* may not be the best game in the world, but it's certainly a unique gaming experience.



Some of the characters are now made from more polygons to make them appear less angular.

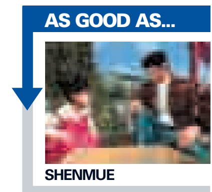
VERDICT 7/10
A MISSED OPPORTUNITY ON XBOX, BUT STILL GREAT

SHADOW OF MEMORIES



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS...



SHENMUE

games™

FUSED

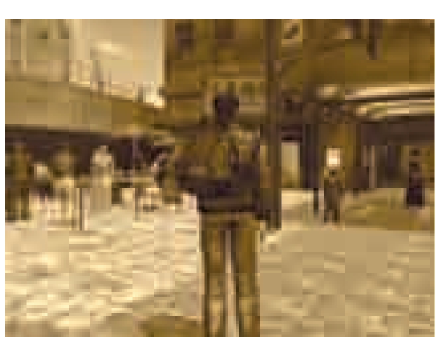
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

A FINGER IN EVERY PIE: Because it blends so many different genres *Shenmue* has been labelled as FREE by its creators. FREE standing for Full Reactive Eyes Entertainment. Whatever that means.

You play Ryo – learning about life in Hong Kong the hard way. But you've still got time for a spot of shopping…



Some of the more flickery textures have been filtered on Xbox. This cobbled market place, for instance, looks far better than on Dreamcast.



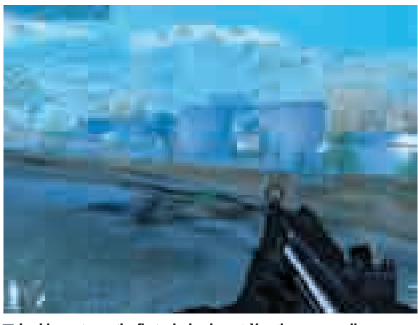
You can now change the look of the game by cycling through five different colour filters with the white button.



Lock-picking and other tasks require time. As the guard on the floor discovered, if you're interrupted halfway through you'll have to start again.



The new thermal imaging device (TID) lets you see guards from behind objects and inside buildings.

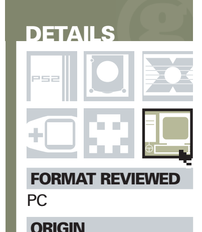


Looking out over the first mission layout. Yes, the maps really are as big as they look.

EX-SAS MAN DAVID JONES GOES BACK UNDERCOVER FOR ANOTHER SERIES OF MISSIONS

IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Norway

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
Innerloop

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (Multiplayer TBC)

MINIMUM SPEC
PentiumII 450MHz; 128Mb RAM; 16Mb graphics card (TBC)

This is the follow-up to the sleeper hit, *Project IGI* – a cross between the classic *Metal Gear Solid* and any of the FPS Tom Clancy military simulators. In this sequel, you're once again playing as ex-SAS trooper David Jones and it's your job to sneak your way through several linked missions, relying on your gadgets, brains and, of course, weaponry. This time though, Innerloop has upped the ante. Gone is the ability to rush through a level by blasting every enemy in sight, and no longer can you get away with shooting a terrorist in the back whilst his comrade stands by and watches. In *IGI 2*, the AI gets smart.

It was a good tactic in the original to go round and shoot the security cameras, rather than temporarily disabling them via an available computer. Try it in *IGI 2*, go on. Hang around outside after you've blown a camera… and get caught by the soldier who comes out to check it. And that's just for starters, because if you're unlucky enough to get caught by a camera or guard and the alarm goes off, you might as well restart the mission, because they don't give up. Watching them through the new thermal imaging device, you'll see as they group up and systematically search the entire area. It's a frightening piece of programming, and it forces you to be extra vigilant, choosing your tactics and route through a level carefully, exactly as the creators intended.

This can cause problems though, and it's something that the original occasionally suffered from too. Because the enemy guards are so smart and so unrelenting, you'll soon tire of attracting anyone's attention. Which brings us smoothly onto the second of *IGI 2*'s flaws; there are no in-game save points. Your game is saved at the start of a mission and, if you fail you have to start again. This rapidly becomes frustrating and will quickly put off casual gamers from playing *IGI 2* for any great length of time. These problems plagued the original, almost sucking out the enjoyment for anyone not prepared to spend days working at the game, and they should have been fixed. It stands to reason then, that if you liked the original, you'll love this. It's more of the same, but bigger, bolder and more intense. There's a great game hidden away inside, but only if you're prepared to put some serious time into playing it.



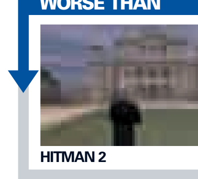
VERDICT 6/10
IMMERSIVE YET FRUSTRATING: A FLAWED GEM

PROJECT IGI



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



HITMAN 2



Make sure you keep your mind on the task in hand and try not to get distracted by the sumptuous graphics. They are lovely, mind…

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
There are ten chapters, though two are merely battles in the clouds and one is the final boss.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE ME TO COMPLETE?
That depends. The main game can be completed in around five hours, but there are so many extras that it could keep you going for a few weeks.

Q. GOOD SOUND?
Like most of SEGA's games, Japanese music studio Wavemaster has created the sound. For *PDO*, the company has used a perfect blend of traditional Japanese instruments and grand orchestra.



Later levels feature many elements from the previous *Panzer Dragoon* games, though the excessive use of smoke and other special effects is exclusive to Xbox.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

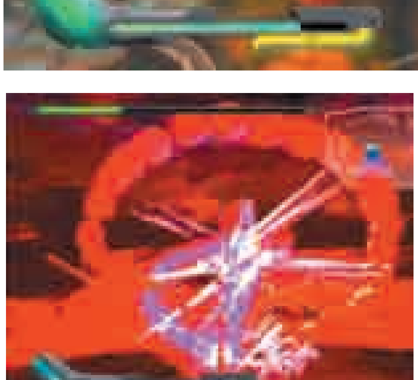
PUBLISHER
Infogrames

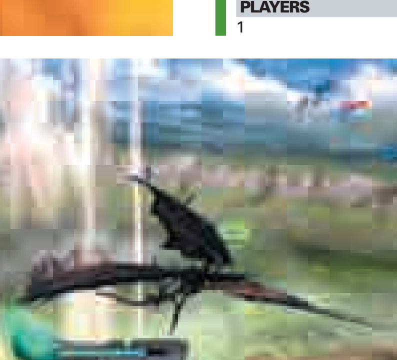
DEVELOPER
SEGA Smilebit

PRICE
¥6800 (£35)

RELEASE
March (Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1





PANZER

When Team Andromeda disbanded back in 1998, fans of *Panzer Dragoon* thought they'd never see a fourth game in the series. After two original shoot-'em-ups and a totally unique RPG, it seemed as if that was the end for one of the most breathtaking videogame series ever to be developed. It all started with the Japanese release of the original SEGA Saturn game back in 1995. Polygons and 3D graphics were clearly where things were heading, but while Sony's PlayStation was certainly cutting-edge as far as 3D processing went, SEGA's Saturn was far more suited to performing 2D tasks. It was because of SEGA's failure to recognise the importance of 3D that many third-party developers chose Sony's hardware as their main development platform – many 3D games of the time simply weren't possible on Saturn. So it's somewhat amazing that the *Panzer Dragoon* series ever came to exist, as the gameplay relies heavily on 3D dynamics and movement – attacks come from 360 degrees during flight.

Despite the obvious drawbacks of the Saturn hardware, Team Andromeda managed to use a large percentage of the machine's limited 3D capabilities and, through creativity, ingenuity and lots of hard work, the game was a triumph of art and imagination. It may have suffered from



A combination of explosive special effects, fine art and big baddies gives you a rough indication of what to expect from *PDO*.

DRAGOON ORTA

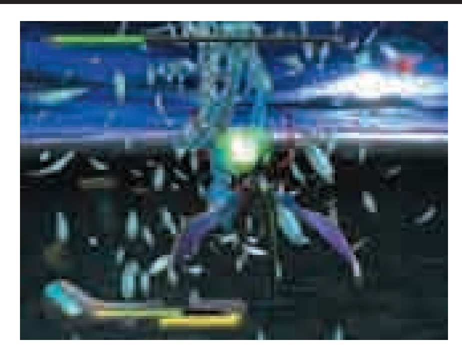
FIND OUT WHY THE LATEST INSTALMENT IN SEGA'S CLASSIC SERIES IS A MUST-HAVE TITLE

hideous pop-up, a low-resolution display and a fluctuating frame rate, but the composition of the levels, thoughtful use of colour and texture, and an unparalleled orchestral soundtrack made *Panzer Dragoon* feel like a big-budget epic movie.

Incredibly, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* improves on the original Saturn masterpiece in every way possible. Not only that, but it also betters *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* (which is often regarded as the best game in the series) and *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. This is all down to the planning and skill of Smilebit – the same team responsible for developing *Jet Set Radio* and *Jet Set Radio Future*. Smilebit's ability to capture the true spirit of the *Panzer Dragoon* series, as well as maximizing the performance of Xbox, isn't too surprising when you discover that this talented SEGA division of just over a hundred employees consists mainly of ex-SEGA PC and Team Andromeda staff. Suddenly the company's decision to resurrect the *Panzer Dragoon* franchise and develop the game on Microsoft's PC-like console doesn't seem so strange after all.

The game starts by introducing new leading lady, Orta – a mysterious girl who knows little of her past and even less about her future. Locked in a tower, high above the streets of an ancient civilization, Orta peers between the bars of her prison window, her arms in chains. Through the darkness appears a group of Imperial Dragonmare – flying beasts manufactured by the Empire – who locate Orta and are about to destroy her when a huge green dragon appears as if from nowhere and delivers her from certain death. Pursued by the Imperial Army, Orta escapes and sets off on a journey that will reveal her importance to the rebel forces opposing the Empire. This intriguing and often psychologically deep storyline offers plenty of opportunity for character development, plot twists and the introduction of new themes and areas.

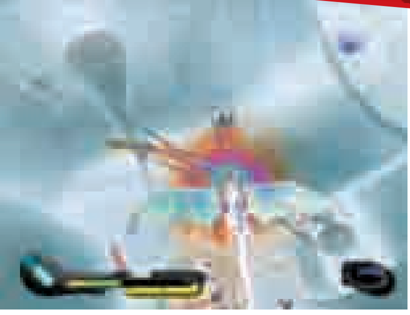
It's clear right from the start that *PDO* is going to be a visual treat, capable of wowing its audience in ways that few games manage these days. The first level sees Orta escaping from the clutches of the Empire and soaring over rooftops as they burst into flames and explode into a selection of transparent smoke and glowing particle effects. Sketchy-looking rain flickers across the screen and frantically changes direction with the wind, as streaks of fork



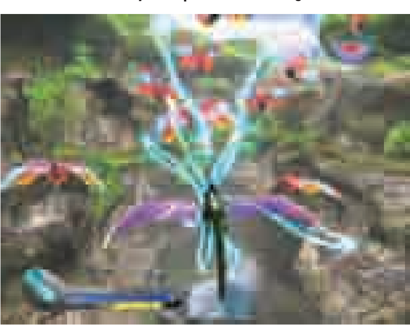
AQUATHERAPY

Part of *PDO*'s appeal is its other-worldly sub-aqua appearance. Flying creatures that resemble crustaceans, squid and flatfish arrive from all directions, many displaying the spectacular colour schemes you'd expect from *Wildlife On One*. There's a remarkable sense of grace and elegance – tentacles, fins and snake-like pulsing propel the creatures through the air. But nothing is more amazing than an epic battle against an enormous pearly-white manta ray that floats over the rippling waters of a vast ocean. As flowing wings carry the huge beast forward, the stand-out moment comes when the creature shoots out a hundred spinning splinters that float towards you through the night sky.

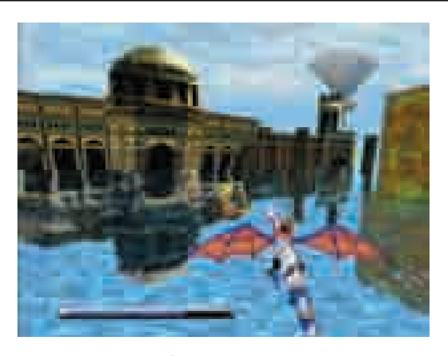




Destroying enemies slowly fills a bar at the bottom left hand side of the screen. When it's full, you can perform a devastating Berserk Attack.



Okay, so now the Xbox technology demos make sense. This level actually does feature hundreds of fluttering butterflies.



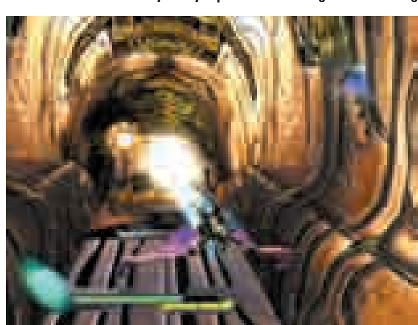
CRAZY XBOX

Just like the popular Crazy Box/Pyramid/X modes in the *Crazy Taxi* games, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* offers a wide selection of extra mini-games in a bonus selection area, cunningly entitled Pandora's Box. Entered from the main options, Pandora's Box not only includes skill and puzzle missions for Orta herself, but also features an alternative story mode focusing on the life of a young soldier training to become part of the Imperial Army. In this mode, you get to view Orta's progression from the enemy's point of view and must learn to fly the Empire's bizarre flying machines.

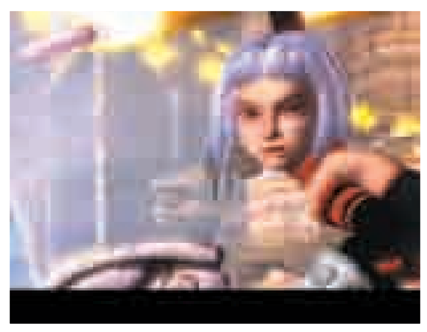
Aside from these engrossing extras, there's also a selection of concept art, videos and background information about the *Panzer Dragoon* world and the creatures that inhabit it. But the real bonus comes in the form of the original *Panzer Dragoon* game which, although looking dated, offers another few hours of gameplay.



A full-on battle in the sky is very impressive. Now imagine ten of these giant ships on-screen at once, without any slowdown.



The confines of a metal tunnel offer a nice contrast to the sprawling exterior scenes that make up a large percentage of the game.

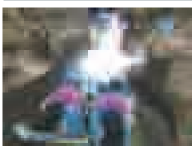


The captivating storyline is helped by the inclusion of a strong leading character, complete with an impressive array of facial expressions.

24:00 TIMELINE HI-LIGHTS

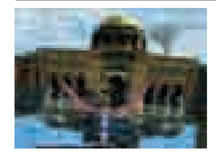
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM...

00:30 MINUTES



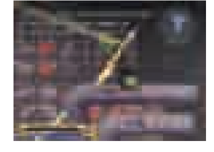
After 30 minutes you'll probably be well into the second level. Get ready for a rollercoaster ride down a river, complete with jaw-dropping textures and visual effects.

05:00 HOURS



If you stick with it, you'll probably be able to complete the game within five hours. Doing so will earn you the right to play through the original *Panzer Dragoon* game.

2 DAYS



With so many extras to earn you'll either be playing through the main game again on a harder difficulty setting or enjoying some of the extras in Pandora's Box.

lightning stab at the ground across the horizon. Just as Team Andromeda managed to implement an amazing sense of drama into the original *Panzer Dragoon* game (both through artistic talent and an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the Saturn hardware), Smilebit has struck a perfect blend of fine art and modern graphics technology. The textures used to re-create the rocky embankments of a meandering river may be the work of an accomplished painter, for example, but the misty water beneath them is purely a stylised graphical effect that reflects everything in a frosty-looking shimmering haze. Similarly, bump-mapping and specular highlights added to the surface of virtually every creature in the game help to indicate depressions, lumps and other imperfections in their leathery skin. Miraculously, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* makes use of all of these things simultaneously and in abundance, without even a hint of slowdown. Other graphic artists and programmers should take a close look at what Smilebit has achieved – not only does the game utilise virtually every effect possible on Xbox, but it's using them in the most effective ways too.

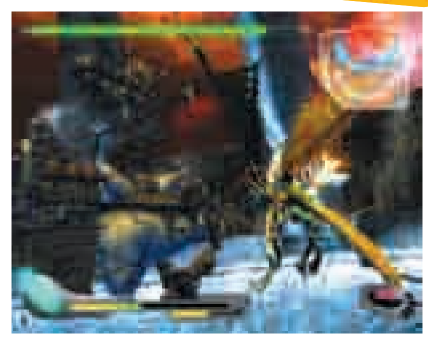
Thankfully, the developers haven't overlooked the importance of good gameplay either and have looked back across the entire *Panzer Dragoon* series for inspiration. While this outing sticks relatively closely to the original games (the main objective is simply to destroy other airborne creatures, whilst carefully moving your dragon around the screen to avoid collisions), there are also a couple of new gameplay additions. For a start, your dragon now has the ability to circle around some enemies – an element first introduced to the series in the stylised RPG, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. Basically, the player can now move between the front, back and sides of enemies during large scale battles, either to avoid attacks or to locate weak spots. The feature has been reinvented for *PDO* and is now performed by means of a boost and brake system. Meters at the bottom of the screen indicate how much boost or brake power you have and you'll need to wait for these to recharge for a few seconds after using one or the other.

The feature is made even more strategic by the fact that you can morph into one of three dragons at any time during play. The Base Wing is the standard default type that allows you to lock-on to multiple targets, has a fairly powerful rapid-fire weapon and can boost or brake twice before becoming exhausted. Then there's the

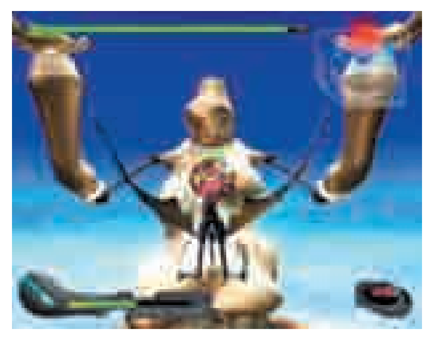


As you'd expect, bosses are even more impressive than your usual enemies. This one even helps you out by accidentally taking out a few of his allies. Watch out for his powerful laser beam though, or you'll end up just as hot and crispy.





The Heavy Wing is the biggest dragon and is particularly good against large-scale bosses like this giant ship.



Bosses come in all shapes and forms, including a golden statue with shimmery bump-mapped skin.

Heavy Wing, which is slightly larger and is extremely powerful, but can't boost or brake. And lastly there's the Glide Wing, which is smaller, can move quickly and can boost or brake four times before becoming exhausted. Each dragon can also be upgraded by collecting power-ups earned by shooting down enough enemies – an element which is fairly unimportant in the grand scheme of things, but it helps to balance the slightly simplistic shooting nature of the game.

But even with such subtleties to the gameplay, initial impressions may leave some gamers with the feeling that progression is a little too shallow – the player has no control over the speed or direction in which they're travelling for example. On top of that, the structure of the game is very much a case of completing one stage before moving onto the next – you're never given the choice of more than one level. There are reasons for this, of course – not only does this remain true to a series that started out when graphics technology didn't allow for too many complex 3D calculations, but also because SEGA has tried to resurrect the atmosphere and excitement of a classic shoot-'em-up, rather than risk producing a watered-down hybrid of genres. Right now the games industry seems to be under the impression that a game is below par if it doesn't combine elements from just about every type of game and last for more than 20 hours. Realistically, most titles fail to achieve a satisfactory standard, regardless of how many genres they blend into the mix – surely five hours of pure bliss is a better alternative.

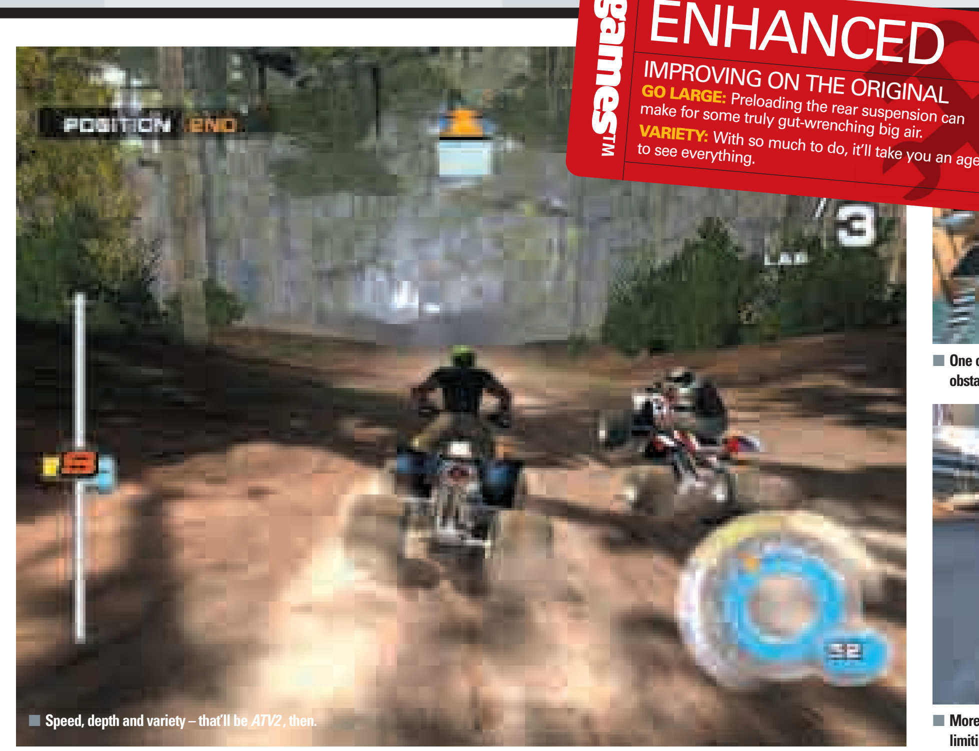
"SEGA HAS TRIED TO RESURRECT THE ATMOSPHERE AND EXCITEMENT OF A CLASSIC SHOOT-'EM-UP, RATHER THAN PRODUCING A WATERED-DOWN HYBRID OF GENRES"

And *Panzer Dragoon Orta* really does offer five hours of pure bliss. After a break of more than four years, Smilebit has re-introduced SEGA's enduring series in style. It's likely that the general public will overlook such a commendable offering in favour of the generous amounts of well-marketed tripe that so regularly reach high positions in the charts. Besides, this is SEGA – a company whose products never seem to achieve high sales figures, irrespective of quality. However, give it a play and you'll discover a remarkable combination of solid gameplay and graphics engineering that mixes the pure playability of a retro title with the technology of today.



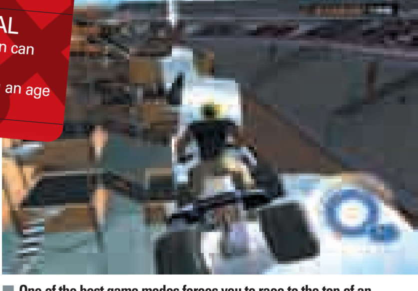
VERDICT 9/10

ONE OF THE BEST GAMES ON XBOX SO FAR



Speed, depth and variety – that'll be *ATV2*, then.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
GO LARGE: Preloading the rear suspension can make for some truly gut-wrenching big air.
VARIETY: With so much to do, it'll take you an age to see everything.


One of the best game modes forces you to race to the top of an obstacle-laden tower.


More tricks can only be unlocked through Career mode – this is a bit limiting, really.

ATV QUAD POWER RACING 2

CAN ACCLAIM MAKE AMENDS FOR THE AWFUL BMX XXX BY ADDING TWO MORE WHEELS AND AN ENGINE?

DETAILS



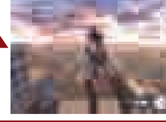

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Acclaim
DEVELOPER
Climax
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4

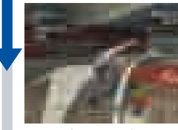
In terms of a sleeper title for this year, we've had an eye on this one for a while. So much so, in fact, that even disasters like *BMX XXX* and *Turok Evolution* haven't quelled our anticipation for this second bout of quad-bike mayhem. With Sony's own four-wheeled sequel not due out until much later this year, Acclaim has managed to get this out at exactly the right time, and thankfully we weren't backing a turkey, either. Spanning Racing, Freestyle, Challenges, Trials and an all-encompassing Career mode, you'll never be short of something to do with your four-wheeled friend.

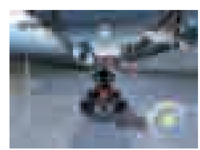
The *AKA* brand has, in all fairness, put something of a downer on Acclaim's most recent 'extreme' titles – only one has yet managed to match the quality of the second *Dave Mirra BMX* title (the superb *Aggressive Inline* even challenged Tony Hawk's crown). The leap in the standard of gaming is nothing short of miraculous, either. It seems impossible for Acclaim to put out an average game as the majority of its output swings violently towards one of two extremes. Thankfully, this time around we're firmly in positive territory but there is still a lingering air of all things *XXX* (shudder) about this. Rather than one feature causing this, it seems to be more the combination of some scantily-clad riders, gratuitous violence and the token nu-metal soundtrack that sends shivers down our spines as we recall *that* BMX title.

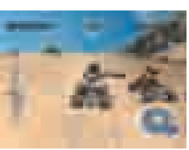
So what of the game itself? Very much as you'd expect really – a larger-than-life take on quad racing where performing tricks allows brief bursts of sickening speed. There's loads to get your teeth into throughout the game's many modes, but our main gripe is that much of it can be somewhat limited until you make good progress in the Career mode. Nonetheless, we were strangely compelled into extensively playing *ATV2* – whether or not the same is true of you, you'll know within your first few minutes of play. Everything on offer clocks in at 'above average' or better, with some flashy visuals and a great physics engine. But while there are hints of originality littered around, the whole package does feel rather generic. The Trials sections could (and arguably should) play a bigger part in the game, and the zooming camera can frustrate at times. But otherwise this is a perfectly accomplished stunt racer. One thing's for sure – this deserves to sell a lot better than it probably will…

VERDICT 6/10
A CONCISE ATV PACKAGE BUT NOT FOR EVERYBODY

MX SUPERFLY

BETTER THAN

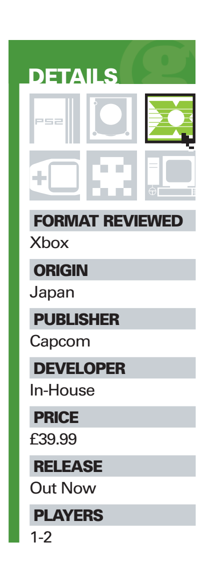
WORSE THAN

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2

GC £39.99 OUT NOW

Good luck spotting the differences; nothing jumped out at us, although the Xbox version did seem just a touch crisper. Not quite so sure on the GC controller for this one, though…

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW

Again, not very different to the Xbox version although visuals were noticeably one rung lower. Nevertheless, it looks and runs at least as smoothly as similar PS2 titles.

WHO BETTER THAN CAPCOM TO DELIVER A MUCH-NEEDED FIGHTING INJECTION TO THE XBOX?

CAPCOM VS SNK 2: EO LIVE



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

The subtitle reads *Millionaire Fighting 2001*. When the title proclaims that the game is at least two years old, is it any wonder that the overall package feels dated even before you place the disc in the Xbox? The same title landed on the GameCube last year (albeit minus online play) and was torn to pieces by many over the atrocity it attempted to pass off as an ingenious control system, and with good reason. Flawed and unbalanced beyond all belief, we thought we'd seen the last of the nightmarish controls. But the *EO* (standing for 'Easy Operation') in the title of this Xbox update gave us more than a little cause for concern. Sadly, our fears were proved right.

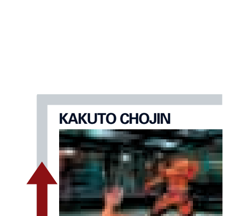
It's hard to put into words just how ill-founded the EO system really is. Light, medium and hard striking attacks are removed from the face buttons and assigned instead to the shoulder triggers, forcing you to squeeze gently for a slight poke and pummel the button for a full-on smack. Far from accurate, as you can imagine, not to mention utterly pointless. Evasive manoeuvres are but a face button away, making recoveries and counters a little too easy, but the special moves really take the biscuit. Tapping the right thumbstick in various directions results in a character's Special and Super moves being performed a little too easily, removing a good deal of the game's otherwise excellent balance. If it weren't for the fact that this is the default setting and has to be changed before every fight it wouldn't be such an issue, but we lost track of the number of times we had to reset after accidentally starting in EO-ism.

Once you get round this, you'll find the game to be every bit as good as any 2D fighter doing the rounds (particularly on Xbox). Forty four starting characters to choose from and six 'grooves' make for countless battle combinations, but we do have to point out that the sprite quality is bizarrely varied. SNK's fighters seem to be slightly more visually appealing while some of Capcom's stable (particularly the horrible Morrigan sprite) fare much worse, although animation is rarely an issue no matter who you choose. Backdrops judder at times too (kind of worrying given what we know the Xbox is capable of). Live support is a bonus, allowing you to be thrashed by faceless foreigners at will, but at the end of the day you're better off hunting down the superior PlayStation2 or import Dreamcast versions. A flawed version of an otherwise great game.

VERDICT 5/10
POOR CONTROLS AND VISUALS HIDE THE GAMEPLAY

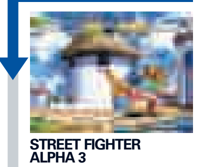
gamesTM GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
GO LIVE: Like its Dreamcast predecessor, *EO Live* lets you take on the world with your mad skills.
WARDROBE: The online element could have been taken further – like sharing high scores or outfits.

KAKUTO CHOJIN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

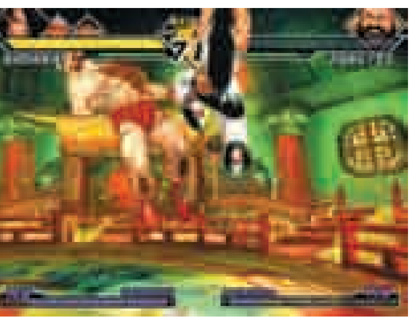


STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

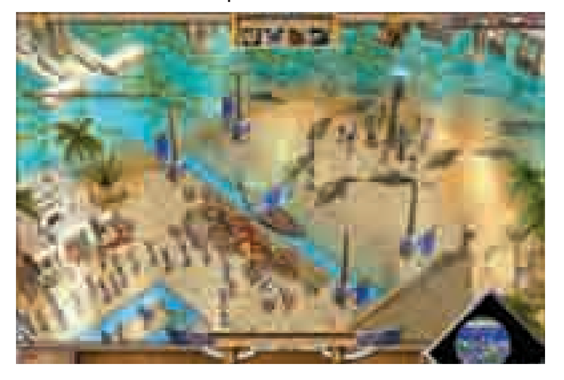


All Survival mode pits you against all of the game's combatants in a row – not a simple task.

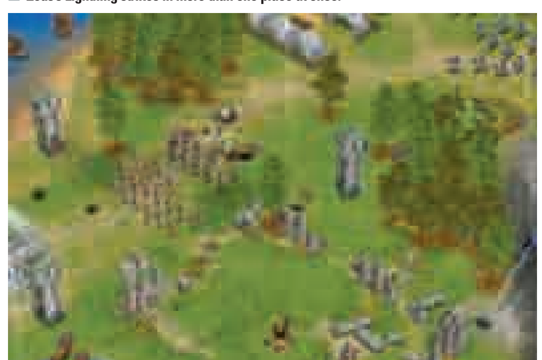

The bane of many players' battling lives can now be executed with a simple tap of the right stick. Joy.


Zangief eats blade as the mighty Haohmaru racks up another victory.

■ Uncover unknown areas of the map with Vision Power.



■ Zeus's Lightning strikes in more than one place at once.





■ Rampaging Hydras can cause plenty of trouble. And mess.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

A NORSE, A NORSE – OUR KINGDOM FOR A NORSE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Ensemble Studios

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium II 450mhz or equivalent; 128Mb RAM; Win98/2000/XP; 1Gb+ HD space; 56K modem for online play (optional)

In the beginning, there was *Age Of Empires*. And RTS gamers looked upon it and lo, it was very good. And thus, the fans found favour in the eyes of the gods of Ensemble and they granted them add-ons and the much improved *Age Of Kings*. But new divinities arose in the shape of *Warrior Kings* and *Medieval: Total War* and the gods of Ensemble became worried that their worshippers might forget them. So they went back to the universal drawing board and created unto them a new game that would keep much that their adorers approved of, but would also include the Gods themselves in the affairs of men. Amen to that.

Of course, a new game means new choices. The Gods you can choose from this time around are ancient Egyptian, Greek and Norse and, unlike the historical ages of previous versions of the formula, you progress from Archaic through Classical and Heroic to the Mythic age where all kinds of wonders and powers are available to you. Despite these changes though, the essential gameplay remains the same. Your lowliest minions gather wood, food and gold as the basic sources of sustenance, building and creating a fighting force, but stone gathering is now replaced by 'Favor' (yes, spelt wrong – pesky Americans…). This is earned by building a temple to one of the Gods of your particular race and assigning people to worship there. At least, that's the plan for the Greeks. The Egyptians, on the other hand, have to build monuments in order to earn their deities' blessings, whilst the more bloodthirsty Norsemen believe the only way to increase their Favor store is by causing the maximum amount of damage to their enemies' buildings and troops.

The differences don't stop there either. From the second you fall flat on your face in worship, you are given the choice of three major Gods to offer your allegiance to (for example, in the Egyptian mode you get Ra, Isis and Set). Each of these offers a different range of supernatural benefits that could help your forces regenerate faster, strengthen armour or hit points, or prevent other Gods' powers from hurting you for a defined period. As a result, you effectively get to choose from playing one of three different possible games – a point further enhanced by selecting from a series of minor Gods in later ages. How you arrive at your

AGE OF EMPIRES 2



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



WARRIOR KINGS



FAQs

Q. DIFFERENT GAME MODES?
Yep, quite a few – Supremacy, Conquest, Deathmatch and Lightning, which is basically Supremacy sped up a bit.

Q. CAN YOU RE-USE GOD POWERS?
Sadly not – each power can only be used once, but any you gain can be carried over to the next age for use later on.

Q. IS THERE A LIMIT ON FAVOR?
Yes, which means you have to strategise depending on who you play as. There's a 100 point limit for Norse and Egyptian, but a massive 200 for Greeks. Lucky buggers.

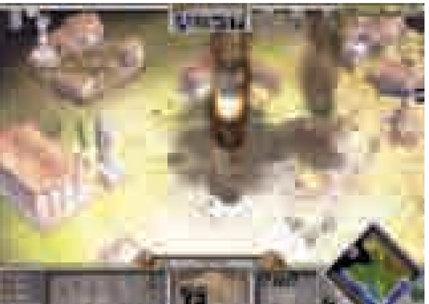


Egyptian ancestors rise with creepy denizens of the deep.

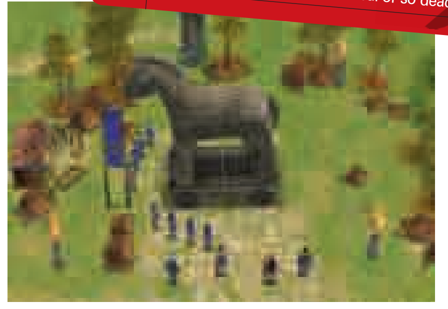
gamesTM ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
MYTH UNITS: You can let your Mountain Giant, Mummy or Minotaur loose with special powers.
3D-4-ME: With the enhanced game engine, the Gods have never seemed so real or so deadly.



There's nothing like a dragon to warm up those cold Norse fjords. Not exactly the most efficient heating system in the world, though.



Unleashing a Meteor Storm should satisfy even the most megalomaniacal gamers.



The old Wooden Horse trick never fails. Unless you forget to put your troops inside before wheeling it into enemy territory, of course.

final mythology may have a significant impact on your chances of victory. In addition, each nation has further in-built checks to keep you on your toes – neither Greeks nor Norsemen are allowed to farm until they reach the Classical age; the monuments of Isis prevent attackers from using their God powers within a certain radius; while if your Greek heroes are killed, their spirits return to the Gods and can be resurrected for use later on. As well as the usual range of archers, cavalry and infantry, you can also create a fascinating range of myth units from a mixture of earthly and heavenly resources, each of which have a range of specialist abilities. The Egyptians could call up a Sphinx or Leviathan to take on a Greek Minotaur or Colossus, while the Norse rely on the fearsome Kraken, Frost Giant or Troll. In keeping with the excellent balance that underpins the whole game though, each myth unit has a fatal Achilles heel.

The single-player campaign is cleverly designed to take you through all three civilisations, so you begin as the Greek hero Arkantos fighting off the enemies of Atlantis before being dragged into the underworld in pursuit of a deranged Cyclops. You emerge first in Egypt and then in the Norse world. This makes for a much more engrossing storyline and gives you a feel for the whole scope of the game. As you'd expect, the beefed-up 3D graphics are superb, particularly on a high-spec machine. Not only are the details mightily impressive but watching the God powers in action is simply awesome: troops are flung about like ragdolls; birds wheel overhead; plagues, fires and tornadoes ravage the land; and sea monsters drag unwary soldiers into the deep. Lovely.

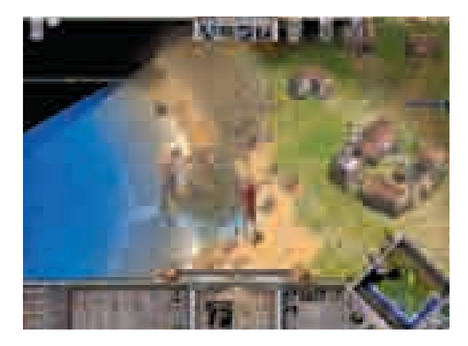
Multiplayer fans will also rejoice at the new choice of ranged forces as it gives a much greater degree of unpredictability to combat, rather than easily assessing what your opponent's weaknesses are. With less emphasis placed on micro-management than before (once a farm is planted it will generate food perpetually, for example), more time can be spent concentrating on genuine strategy and building up a powerful army. Not since *Zeus: Master Of Olympus* have the gods smiled so benignly on RTS worshippers, and for new adorers and regular acolytes alike, *Age Of Mythology* is a revelation – this is a must for followers and atheists alike.

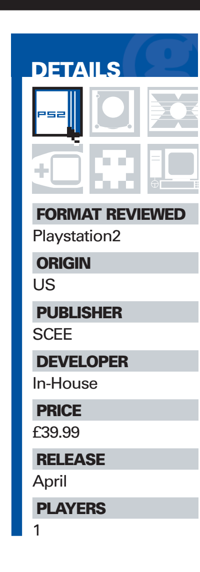


VERDICT 8/10
AGE OF EMPIRES TAKEN TO DIVINE EXTREMES

SMACK MY SPHINX UP

If you want to turn the tide of battle in your favour, the only way to do it is to suck up to the Gods and get them to give you their heavy hitting powers. You could go for relatively wussy attacks like Eclipse and Plague of Locusts, but if you mean business then you've got to opt for mega-blows like Lightning Storm, Earthquake or Meteor. It's also useful to keep in reserve stuff like Shifting Sands (for teleporting enemy forces), Underworld Passage (for getting through Hades) and Forest Fire (to cut off a vital building source). Healing powers should also be high on your list, but one of our favourites is the Egyptians' Ancestors, which will resurrect an army of undead soldiers at your command.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Playstation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
April

PLAYERS
1

PRIMAL

IS SONY'S FIRST BIG TITLE OF 2003 A CASE OF STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE?



gamesTM FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BEAST LADY: The heroine, Jen, is able to change form as you progress through the game.

NO CONTROL: The action buttons are context sensitive – the game, not you, decides what they'll do.

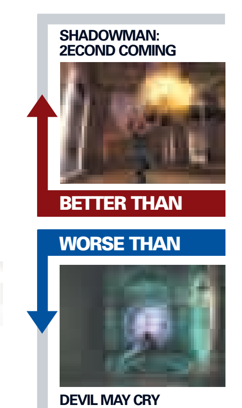
It's rare that Sony puts its money behind the wrong game. Since the birth of the original PlayStation, the big advertising campaigns have pushed (and made) some of the best games in Sony's catalogue – *Gran Turismo*, *Tekken* and *Wipeout* have all been given significant exposure, followed more recently by *Ratchet & Clank*, *The Getaway* and now *Primal*. Far be it from us to criticize the marketing strategy of the superpower of gaming, but after sampling the subject of this latest set of high profile adverts it's clear that *Primal* isn't even in the same league as any of the games we've just mentioned. Hark then, weary traveller, as we recount a tale of battles, of monsters and of what could have been…

While the concept behind *Primal* is excellent, the execution is flawed to say the least. The graphics, to be fair, are really quite polished – the characters look and move as well as those in pretty much any PS2 game you may care to mention. Unfortunately though, this is practically where all the goodness ends. The action (if you can call it that) centres around one of the worst close combat systems of recent years and some very basic puzzle solving, all interspersed with far too much aimless wandering. The trekking in itself wouldn't be so bad but it rarely involves anything more than reaching an obvious waypoint on the game's map. While the game may be fairly easy on the eye, things are not always as they seem – glitching through objects, invisible boundaries and, above all, an awful in-game camera do put something of a downer on this otherwise attractive adventure.

It's difficult to pinpoint one disastrous aspect of *Primal* – each area of the game is, at worst, horribly average, but when combined the whole experience is just so overwhelmingly dull, painfully linear and generally uninspiring that we felt entirely unmotivated to progress. But progress we did, all the while hoping that the adventure we so wanted to enjoy would finally get started. It never did. When the presentation is of such a high standard (bar the rather hideous music – 16 Volt's painful rock/thrash/metal shenanigans make Nickelback seem almost bearable), it's a shame that the rest of the game can't keep up. We have to wonder though – why is Sony choosing to put so much weight behind *Primal* when *The Mark Of Kri* (due in April) already looks far superior? The mind boggles…

VERDICT 4/10

SOME NICE IDEAS IN AN OTHERWISE STALE PACKAGE

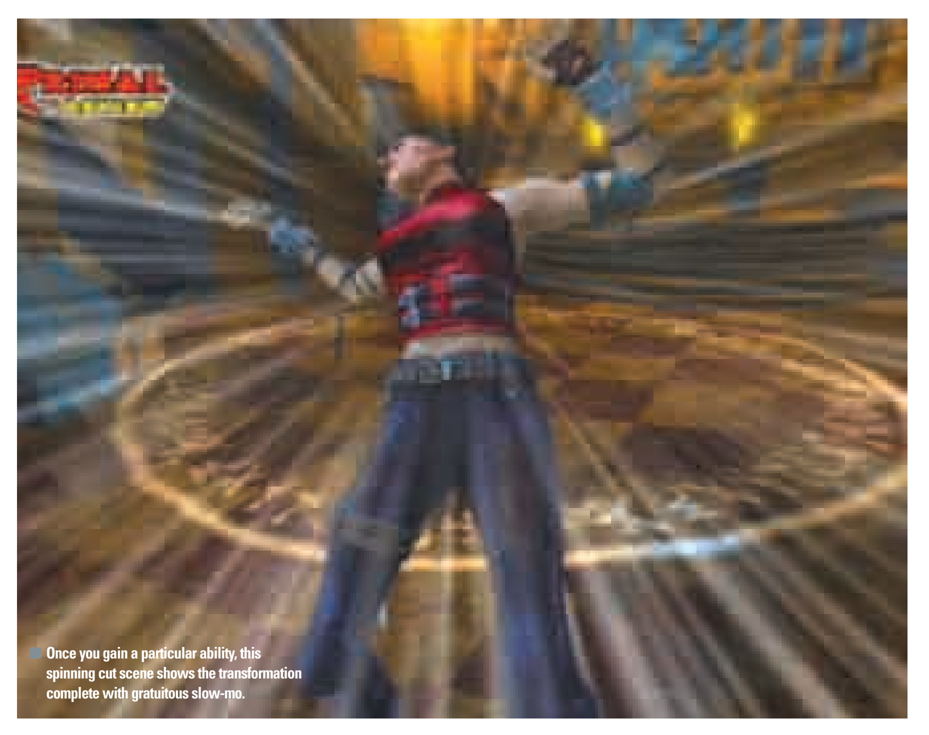


SHADOWMAN: 2ECOND COMING

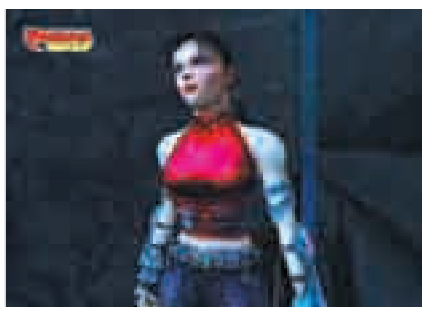
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

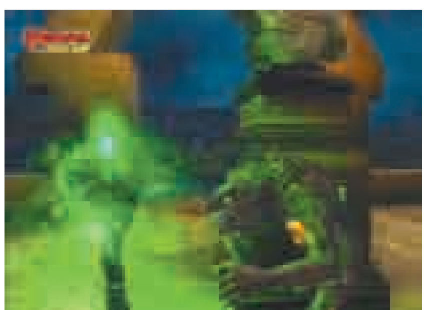
DEVIL MAY CRY



Once you gain a particular ability, this spinning cut scene shows the transformation complete with gratuitous slow-mo.



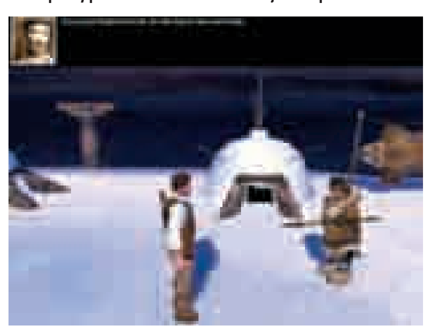
Drawing a strange parallel with the game itself, Jen is proof that looks can be deceiving…



Jen's beast forms tend to be more powerful than her fragile human side. Well, she is only a girl, after all.



Make your very own astounding beasts. The buttons down the side swap body parts. Don't like the head? Then just swap it out…



Dialogue between your character and non-player characters builds up the storyline, while specific quests are a nice break from battles.



The game is fully 3D, allowing you to rotate and zoom using the mouse and keyboard. Witness the amazing Girilla – grrr.

gamesTM FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
IT'S IN YOUR HANDS: Create any bizarre creature your confused mind can come up with.
UNWILLING SUBJECTS: Collect new genetic material from innocent animals wandering the land.

GO INTO BATTLE WITH A GOAT-HEADED CHEETAH? POKÉMON, IT AIN'T

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Relic

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-6

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 500 MHz; 4x CD-ROM; 128Mb RAM; Windows 98/ME/XP/2000; 1.5Gb HD space; 16Mb DirectX compatible video and sound cards

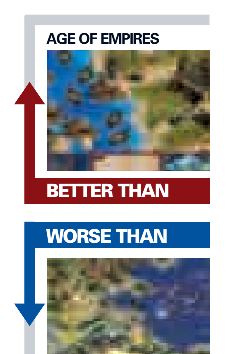
As a rule, the term 'real-time strategy' isn't one that gets the blood pumping. Despite being more action-packed than its turn-based brethren, it's easy for an RTS game to fall into the predictable 'build a base, get an army, rush the enemy' pattern. Strategy rarely comes into play, and because of this your average RTS war game requires something special in order to stand out from the crowd. *Red Alert 2* had it in spades with its frantic and inventive gameplay, but can *Impossible Creatures* live up to the heritage left by Westwood's classic series? Incredibly, it does – but only by not sticking to the standard RTS template you'd expect it to use.

The obvious difference is the employment of animals rather than human or mechanical troops, the requirement being that you have to genetically mix and match various animals to create a single unit. You start the game (following a rather poorly animated intro sequence) stranded on an island controlling one of the game's two main characters, with your task being to collect genetic samples of various animals. Returning these samples to your Lab – the game's key building – means you can then use the Battle Lab to create your hybrid army. Each animal is assigned points for its skills, like a character in one of those hideously tedious role-playing board games, and it's up to you to mix the skills of each to create the perfect soldier. Despite sounding bizarre, *Impossible Creatures* handles this potentially gimmicky feature very well by not only integrating it seamlessly into the interface, but by making it an important part of the gameplay. And it's a system that works… most of the time. Later on in the game, the wide array of mutation options can cause gameplay to become unbalanced and it's more noticeable in this case due to the user-created units – especially in a multiplayer match with more experienced players.

To be honest, this isn't a game that newcomers to the genre will find easy to pick up. The tutorial and early maps lead you in gently enough, but when you've got to manage your resources (coal and electricity), defend a base, complete sub-quests and create new units all at the same time, it's easy to panic and this often results in you having to restart the mission. Ultimately though, it's worth the effort getting the hang of the game – after all, there really is nothing quite like having an army of genetic freaks at your beck and call…



VERDICT 7/10
A TRICKY BUT FUN SPIN ON A TIRED THEME



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Playstation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

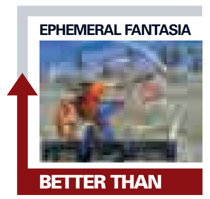
DEVELOPER
Media Vision

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

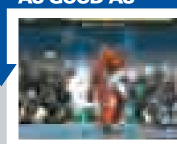
PLAYERS
1

EPHEMERAL FANTASIA



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



FINAL FANTASY X

WHO NEEDS PROGRESS WHEN THERE'S GOOD OLD-FASHIONED GAMEPLAY TO BE ENJOYED, EH?

WILD ARMS 3

Despite what some fanboy-types might think, the *Final Fantasy* series isn't the be all and end all of top-quality RPGs on the PlayStation. Sure, *Final Fantasy VII* might have been the title that introduced adventure gaming to the mass market, but obviously it's not just Square that can come up with the goods in that department. Take the *Wild Arms* series, for instance. Appearing at a time when everyone was trying to get a piece of the RPG popularity pie on the PSone, it managed to do what most of the *Final Fantasy* clones couldn't accomplish by offering a game that appealed more to the old-school adventurer in all of us. By combining fantasy-style adventuring with Wild West concepts, *Wild Arms* brought something fresh to a genre that was already getting crowded with shoddy storylines and generic characters. Considering that there's less of an RPG glut on the PS2 though (and while everyone awaits the next Square offering), we're glad that the current void is being filled with a third instalment of the *Wild Arms* saga – ideal if you're looking for something a little more traditional.

Set once again in a world that bears more than a passing resemblance to any number of John Wayne's spaghetti western movies, *Wild Arms 3* follows the story of four Drifters – lone travellers who wander the land of Filgaia searching for fortune and adventure. As is often the case with team-based adventure games, these figures are thrown together by fate to take on a great mission that could (surprise, surprise) stop the world from being destroyed and save mankind. It's not exactly original as far as plotlines go, but at least the inclusion of a themed angle puts a whole new spin on an age-old concept.

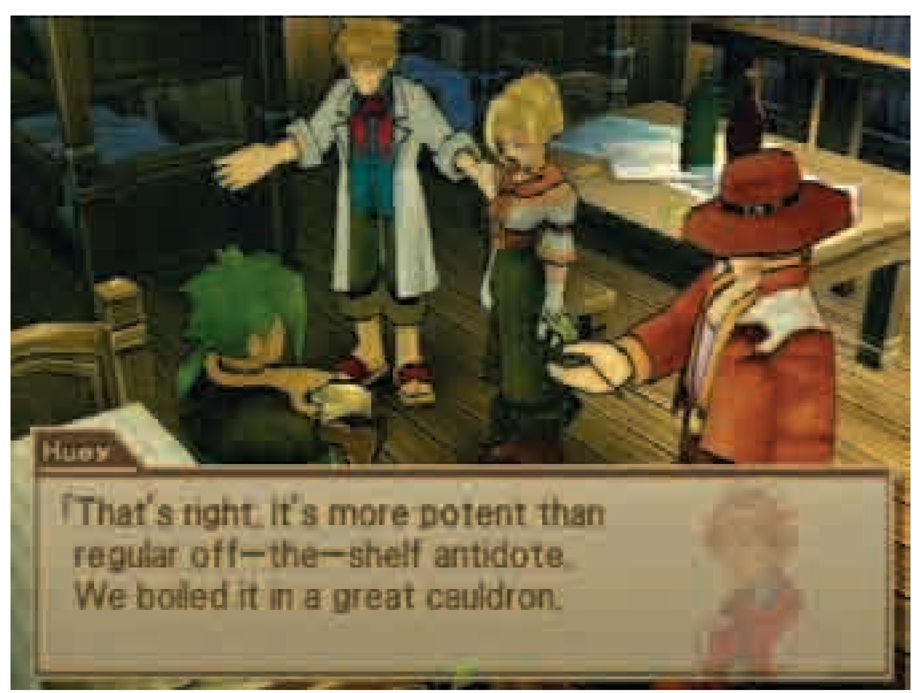
The main thing that makes *Wild Arms 3* stand out against other recent RPGs (particularly if it's a genre you've only embraced in the last few years) is the distinctly old-school gameplay. In contrast to the more open and progressive feel of the *Final Fantasy* games, *Wild Arms 3* takes a step back into the annals of the RPG adventure by offering distinctly dungeon-based action which, to be honest, is no bad thing at all. More comparable to games such as virtually every *Zelda* title, *Alundra* or *Skies Of Arcadia* than it is to Square's epic *Final Fantasy* series, the main focus of the game changes depending on your location. In the overworld areas, you'll be talking to non-player characters and forwarding the plot while in the dungeon stages, you'll have to deal with taxing puzzles and careful exploration. In the dungeons

FAQs

Q. WHAT'S IT COMPARABLE TO…?
Think less *Final Fantasy* (with its story-led settings) and more *Alundra* or *Zelda: A Link To The Past* – the action focuses heavily on map-based dungeons and puzzle solving.

Q. LONG OR SHORT?
According to the bods at Sony, a first-time player without guides should be able to complete it in about 20-25 hours – and that's not including the hidden stuff.

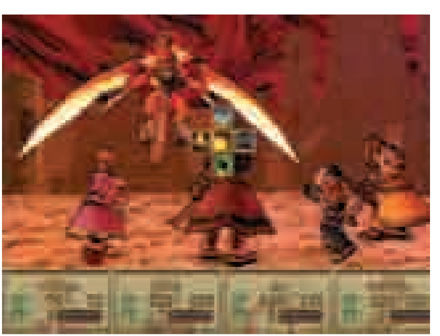
Q. HIDDEN STUFF? WHERE? WHERE?
The more hard-core RPG fans will find a plethora of secret dungeons, missions and boss fights on top of the main storyline – exactly what a good RPG needs.



As well as the usual character interaction, *Wild Arms 3* harks back to the earlier days of RPGs when dungeon exploring and puzzle solving were the order of the day, and when all round here were fields. Happy days.



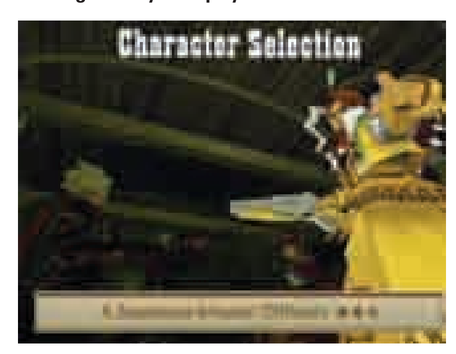
Running rivalries follow throughout the whole adventure – these opportunist thieves, for example, have a hidden agenda up their sleeves…



The game's 'moving battlefield' will keep you on your toes as friends and foes alike run all over the place.

IN THE BEGINNING

Before the whole adventure kicks off and you get to play as a team, there's the small matter of the prologue. Shortly after the game's opening cut-scene in which a train robbery gets bungled, you'll be presented with the choice of playing through four different stages that not only introduce each of the characters you'll be using, but act as tutorials for the game's basic mechanics. Playing as Virginia Maxwell (the heroine of the game) lets you get to grips with exploring dungeons and solving simple puzzles, while choosing Jet Enduro (a would-be thief) teaches you about tools and how to use them. There's also Gallows Caradine (an ex-priest turned Drifter) who knows the art of Arcane magic and Clive Winslett (yes, Clive, he's also a Drifter) who can teach you how to use Force Powers. Not surprisingly, the main adventure won't begin until you've played as them all.



particularly, this is a very welcome regression to the way things used to be as opposed to how they've become – while pushing blocks onto switches and lighting flames in the right order might seem old hat, it's much more thought-provoking and demanding than the open RPG games of recent times.

Despite the direct contrast in gameplay though, *Wild Arms 3* does pinch a little from the *Final Fantasy* cookie jar in the form of random, turn-based battles. Certainly, the unique 'moving battlefield' approach (in which the heroes and enemies run around each other in what looks like some bizarre form of kiss chase) makes for interesting and more strategic fighting. However, we can't help feeling that there are far too many random encounters at times – particularly in dungeons and early on when some of your team can be wiped out in a single attack. And they tend to get in the way sometimes when you're halfway through working out exactly which switch to step on next.

Of course, just because an RPG features gameplay that might feel more at home on a retro console, that doesn't mean it has to look old as well – indeed, *Wild Arms 3* looks nicer than a lot of similar-styled adventure games we've seen not just on the PS2, but across all the formats. Using several methods including cel-shading (which is being ridiculously over-used in games at the moment) and a subtle blend of pencil-coloured textures, the whole thing looks as though it's come straight out of a storybook; exactly what you'd want for a decent RPG. It's nice to see a game taking a different approach for once as opposed to the 'totally realistic' look that a lot of games on next-gen consoles feel inclined to feature.

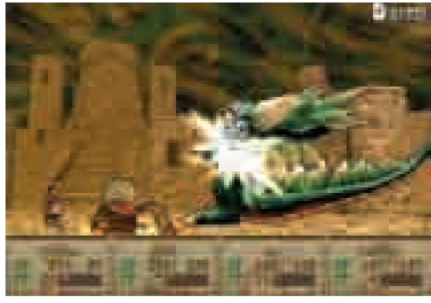
The only thing we would have wished for was some more impressive effects during the magical summoning sections of battle – they're nice, but nowhere near as impressive or jaw-dropping as the ones in *Final Fantasy X*. However, it's clear from the off that *Wild Arms 3* is certainly up there as one of the better RPG games available on the PS2 today, even if it's not entirely devoid of faults. For once, adventure fans have a reason to stop holding their breath for the next big Square thing and look to the present instead.

VERDICT 8/10

TAKING IT BACK TO THE RPG OLD SCHOOL, BWOYEE



■ You'll have to use these scan lines as a radar when exploring the world map – if you're not looking in the right place though, you'll find naff all.



■ Using your weapons on an enemy is all very well, but you'll have to waste a turn reloading them when the ammo finally runs dry.



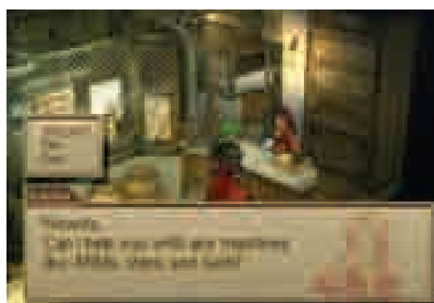
■ A few battles take place in the most familiar of places – didn't we fight on a train in *Final Fantasy VII*? And *Final Fantasy VIII*? And *Skies Of Arcadia*?

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

KEEP MOVING: The 'moving battle' system means planning a new attack strategy for each round.

QUICK DRAW: Glorious graphics in a hand-drawn style are a nice change from the usual RPG 'realism'.



■ You can visit ARMs Smiths in most of the towns and get your weapons upgraded. But they don't come cheap – especially later on in the game.



■ Say, you cowboys aren't from round here, are ya? Kinda funny lookin'…

MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS PROUDLY PRESENTS… ONE OF THE WORST XBOX GAMES TO DATE

KAKUTO CHOJIN



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Dream Publishing

PRICE
$49.99 (£32)

RELEASE
16 May (Japan: TBA/ US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

When Sony announced its plans for PlayStation2, there was one game that stood out. A game that looked set to truly embrace the additional power that PS2 had over the previous generation. A game that featured totally interactive environments and an emotional storyline, realised through real-time cut-scenes. That game was *The Bouncer*, a scrolling beat-'em-up featuring characters designed by the same artist who developed the protagonists in *Final Fantasy VIII*. Sadly, after a number of delays, *The Bouncer* arrived and failed in just about every way imaginable. Not only had the graphics been downgraded significantly but the gameplay – which was horribly broken up with an abnormally large number of cut-scenes – featured none of the promised interactive environments.

Well, *Kakuto Chojin* is from the same company (Dream Factory, now renamed Dream Publishing) and it shows. Although it hasn't been pushed as much as some of Microsoft's other games, *Kakuto Chojin* has been on show at all of Microsoft's major game-related events. Unlike *The Bouncer*, this fighting game is of the one-on-one variety and restricts its players to small, enclosed fighting arenas. Early screenshots revealed that many visual effects (such as bump-mapping and shadow-casting) were being used to make skin look wet and to enhance the environments. Again, it turns out that most of what was shown was actually rendered on a high-end workstation, rather than being produced by the Xbox itself. And, although the game doesn't look totally dissimilar to the early version, the finished product looks far less vibrant.

However, it's the gameplay that disappoints the most. The few combos that exist are executed simply by tapping a combination of buttons, and the connection between characters feels spongy and unpredictable. On top of that, there's virtually no interaction with the backgrounds. Although it's possible to hit the walls and even fall out of the arenas on rare occasions, the game cunningly moves the action around to prevent such a thing from happening frequently. It's quite shocking that Microsoft deems *Kakuto Chojin* fit for release. Not only does the game fail to make proper use of the powerful hardware, but it also fails to match, or even approach, the quality of almost every similar title on rival formats. Microsoft needs to do better than this if it wants to beat Sony.

VERDICT 2/10
KAKUTO BY NAME, KAKUTO BY NATURE

KABUKI WARRIORS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



THE BOUNCER



■ If the connection was as solid as it looks here, chances are *Kakuto Chojin* would be much better.

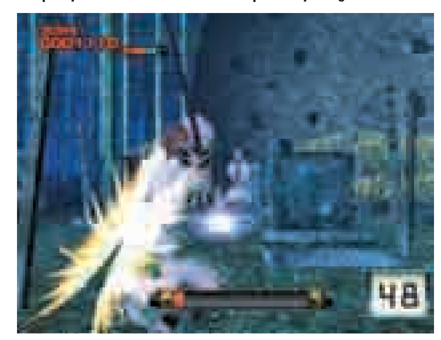


■ For Cher, the fun to be had with *Kakuto Chojin* was all over far too quickly. We know how she feels.

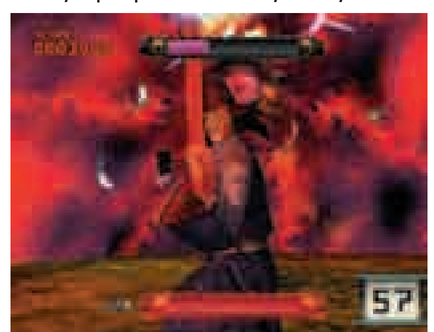


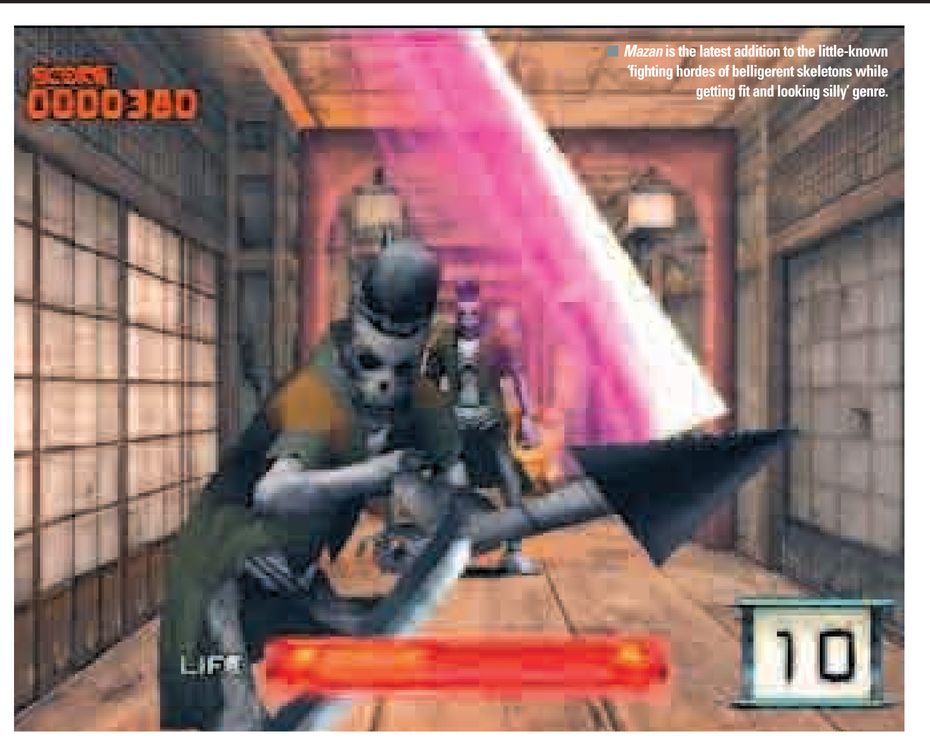
■ It usually isn't clear exactly what's connecting with what.

■ Spooky environments add some atmosphere to your fights.



■ Tommy Cooper impersonators will also try to defeat you.





■ *Mazan* is the latest addition to the little-known 'fighting hordes of belligerent skeletons while getting fit and looking silly' genre.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

THE BEST ARCADE WORKOUT THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE DANCING LIKE A LOON

MAZAN: FLASH OF THE BLADE

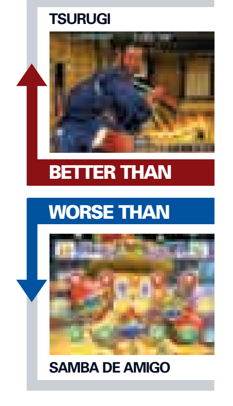
As we've already covered in our *Steel Battalion* review, games that require stupidly large or bizarrely shaped controllers tend to work better in the arcade than they do at home. Obviously the idea of an arcade game is to draw you in, so the more unique the game looks compared to the usual two joystick/six button combination, the better. Unfortunately, some games go so far as to look intimidating to play, and as you might guess, that's the case with *Mazan: Flash Of The Blade.*

With its huge motion-sensor arch and replica Katana sword, you might be forgiven for passing up the chance to play *Mazan* simply because it looks far too complicated – and whereas dancing is something that comes fairly naturally to most people, samurai skills are a bit trickier. However, if you can get over the initial fear of looking like a complete arse while playing it, you'll soon discover that *Mazan* is damn good fun. The premise is simple; as you move the sword blade through the arch, it appears on-screen in the same position. As the enemies attack, you have to move the blade to block the blows and then counter with a slash of your own.

Of course, it's not as simple as it sounds and while some people might find themselves cursing as they succumb to a well-placed slice for the umpteenth time, more methodical gamers will realise it's about more haste, less speed. Whereas most arcade games rely on fast-paced action, *Mazan* is much more delicate and deliberate; each block must be carefully placed before the counter blow is struck, rather than just waving the sword around like a madman. What's more, you can 'push' enemies away by moving the sword toward the screen immediately after the parry, effectively staggering them and giving you a free strike.

Like *Dancing Stage EuroMix* and *Samba De Amigo, Mazan* is the kind of physical game that not all arcade-goers will feel the need to play. That's a shame though, because it's really quite good. You'll just have to get over your inhibitions to find out.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
MMM, PRETTY: *Mazan* looks miles better than Konami's swordplay-style game, *Tsurugi.*
PUSH IT GOOD: The unique 'push' system allows you to stagger enemies with a quick shove.





GOING THE DISTANCE

THREE NEWCOMERS TAKE TO THE STARTING GRID, BUT WHICH WILL ACHIEVE PODIUM GLORY? WE PUT THE CANDIDATES THROUGH THEIR PACES…

As the market fills to bursting point, it's getting harder to get excited by racing games. If it's not to be lost in the crowd, a racer must show either an all-new concept or tackle an established format in a truly excellent fashion. We've seen many casualties recently, several of which could almost be accused of trying too hard. *Auto Modellista*, for instance, was a valiant attempt at something different which just wasn't all it could have been. By this token, for a game to try to be a realistic racing 'simulation', we can only assume that it's confident in its content. Lacking the origins of *Gran Turismo* or *SEGA GT*, can these rookie racers beat the rest of the pack off the line?



DETAILS

Lamborghini

FORMAT:	Xbox/Multi
ORIGIN:	UK
PUBLISHER:	TBA
DEVELOPER:	Rage
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	TBA
PLAYERS:	1-2

Racing Evoluzione

FORMAT:	Xbox
ORIGIN:	France
PUBLISHER:	Infogrames
DEVELOPER:	Milestone
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	Out Now
PLAYERS:	1-2

World Racing

FORMAT:	Xbox/Multi
Origin:	Germany
PUBLISHER:	TDK
DEVELOPER:	Synetic
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	28 Feb
PLAYERS:	1-2

AESTHETICS

It's all about looking good and sounding sweet when you hit the circuit

Lamborghini

A superb lighting engine is probably the force behind the flashy visuals. The sun burns through canopies and dapples light across the pristine bodywork while shadows are used more heavily than the reflected surroundings seen in other games. Unfortunately, these flashy effects look a little false at times and, aside from the beautiful cars, the backdrops are probably the weakest of the three games. In compensation, the game runs at a fluid 60 frames per second and all things audio are exactly as they should be.

Racing Evoluzione

Evoluzione finds itself stranded between the pretty and the pretty unremarkable. Real-time reflections and some of the car models are highlights (others are a bit ropey, as are many of the viewpoints) and the action is generally smooth. Presentation is top-notch while course and vehicle variety are both of a fair standard, but the audio lets things down. Sound effects are passable at best while the music is a hideous mix of cheesy dance and 'funky' tunes. Ripping your own soundtrack is essential.

World Racing

In terms of scenery, we're not sure there's a racer out there that can come close to the scale and detail here. Massive environments are fully rendered and branching tracks litter the landscapes – you'll continually find new landmarks, routes and features. The sound effects are splendid and much of the music comes from of the Ministry Of Sound label – granted, it may not be to everyone's taste but it works in context. This is the looker of the pack, although the frame rate can show the strain a little.







■ These are some pretty games. Each has its own style but we wouldn't want to pin down a definite winner – there's equal merit in the aesthetics of all three.

GAMEPLAY

The key factor; if this doesn't feel right, we'd recommend a lengthy (read: indefinite) pit stop

Lamborghini

Even behind the wheel of the low-end vehicle, you'll get a great sense of power, presence and speed from the familiar sports cars. There's plenty to be doing, too – a quick tour of your garage will reveal countless empty spaces waiting to be filled with trophies and expensive cars. Whatever you do though, don't expect an easy ride; some races and challenges are tough and losing an important 'pink slip' race could see your wallet (and your garage) looking a bit empty. You have been warned.

Racing Evoluzione

A wave of uncertainty washed over us after the first few races, but we stuck it out. Surely it must get better. And it does. Just. Considering the handling of the starting cars is nothing short of disgusting, later vehicles are notably more enjoyable and rewarding to drive. There's a fair sense of speed at times (though none at others, strangely) but we found there to be a little too much emphasis on powerslides and slipstreaming – both seem overly effective no matter which car you use.

World Racing

Easily the most realistic of the three games, although thanks to an option in the menu, this can be altered to suit your play. We found the default setting perfectly playable, but set the slider towards Arcade and you'll drift around corners will ease while Simulation is as unforgiving as they come – definitely one for the experts. One slight worry is the lack of a true sense of speed – it's not until you obtain the later super cars that you really get to sample the faster things in life.







■ From the sublime to the ridiculous; *Lamborghini* is suitably 'pick up and play' while the other two will require a little more effort – perhaps a little too much in the case of *Evoluzione*.







World Racing goes for the tried and tested, *Lamborghini* throws money into the equation but *Racing Evoluzione* has the most in-depth quest in its Dream mode. As we've said before, this is far from the megalomaniacal experience we were hoping for but its presentation is probably the pick of the bunch.

STRUCTURE

Garage to Grand Prix, how is the racing set out?

Lamborghini

Money, money, money is all you need. As you work up through the ranks of international racing you'll face single races, tournaments and tricky challenges in pursuit of a healthy bank balance. Basic progression is simple enough – prove your worth in a series of races to claim victory and move onto the next set. Many of these are tailored for individual cars so you'll need a good collection to enter them all. And if that weren't enough, each car also has several unique challenges (think the Overtake, Average and Max Speed challenges of *Project Gotham Racing*) to keep you occupied.

Racing Evoluzione

Ever fancied running your own car company? Well, now you can – if only it weren't quite so limiting, eh? You'll start Dream mode with two prototypes to choose from and successful racing will bring interest in your firm. This is a lot less complex than it sounds; behind the facade is merely a glorified points system but it does function remarkably well once it gets going. Challenge races occasionally break up the action but, with so many cups and leagues to work through this is traditional racing all the way.

World Racing

As traditional as they come: there's no garage, money or factory to be playing around with – everything you need can be found either in the menus or on the courses. Success in the leagues will open up further leagues and challenges for your racing pleasure, but you'll never need to take your mind off the task in hand. This could be seen as either a lack of variety or as a clear focus, but at the end of the day a racing game is a racing game and we expect to be doing just that.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

It'll take more than just pop-up headlights and airbags to impress us…

Lamborghini

Gran Turismo never featured them. *SEGA GT* never featured them. In fact, Lamborghini fans have been left wanting by even the most comprehensive recent racers. While it may not sound like much, having the entire catalogue of Italian sports cars (past and present) is a respectable achievement, especially when they're so well depicted. Those nice people at Lamborghini have also ensured that a Test Dive mode is included, making every car available for a run on the test course from the off. Great for indulging a few motoring fantasies. Curse those 'Buy Me' number plates…

Racing Evoluzione

In theory, the premise behind Dream mode is an excellent selling point but even after extensive play there's very little actual decision-making involved. That said, it's still a valiant effort at bringing something new to the genre. *Evoluzione* really needed to take its concept the whole way and allow users to design vehicles from the ground up, but instead we'll have to settle for a fistful of pre-designed concept cars and a fair variety of licensed sports cars to keep us going.

World Racing

Quantity, and lots of it. Over one hundred cars and tracks are unlockable as your racing career's success snowballs out of control and you're able to explore the massive landscapes at will with the Free Run option. Of the three games, this has by far the most to do – nearly 20 championships (with up to eight long races in each) as well as numerous missions should keep you racing for a good while. Lucky you're not paying for any of that petrol…

"As you work up through the ranks of international racing, you'll face single races, tournaments and tricky challenges"



Each of the racers we tested does have something unique to offer. Motoring fans will undoubtedly fall for the sleek sports cars of *Lamborghini*, entrepreneurs can start a fresh company with *Evoluzione* while *World Racing* features some of the finest surroundings we've seen in a driving game.

VERDICT The low-down on how the competitors fared overall

Lamborghini

When a game is as instantly enjoyable as this, it's hard to find fault with the gameplay – we jumped straight in and enjoyed every bit of the steadily evolving Championship mode. Outside of this, there's actually not a whole lot else to do and herein lies *Lamborghini*'s one true fault – it's just too simple. Not in a difficulty sense, you understand, and not in an especially bad way either, but with such a limited car pool to draw from even the full line-up of vehicles looks a little sorry next to some of the huge car counts that we see in other current racers. Nevertheless, *Lamborghini* is a joy to play and while it may not last as long as the other two titles, this is no indication of a lower quality title – this is a well-crafted title that anyone should be pleased to own.

RATING 7

A touch limited but a very enjoyable game nonetheless

Racing Evoluzione

In all honesty, there's nothing terribly wrong with *Evoluzione* bar some very questionable handling early on. Unfortunately, there's also little to shout about here either – we've come to expect huge amounts of licensed cars and varied tracks so it's the extra features we look to for ingenuity. Sure enough, we get it too – but Dream mode should have been so much more. Think of it not so much as managing the car company, more looking after the place while the owner is away. Sure, it's fairly enjoyable and lengthy once you get into it but we can't help feeling that it's a whole lot simpler than the idea behind it would have you believe. With such erratic handling styles, it's nigh-on impossible to learn how the vehicles will cope in different situations. Disappointingly average.

RATING 5

A promising concept let down by flawed execution

World Racing

Credit where credit's due, German developer Synetic has worked miracles to get everything looking this beautiful – but it comes at a price. The occasionally shaky frame rate doesn't directly impair gameplay but it does detract from one of the game's crowning features – its overwhelming beauty. In terms of course layout, this is how we foresee many future racers – we've never seen such scale and detail from a racing game but we hope we will again. Trouble is, with so many new ideas being thrown into the racing equation, this traditional win-progress-win-unlock formula is feeling worryingly dated, despite its impressive functionality. Stat fans and hard-core racers will lap this up, but we'd recommend it equally to those who fancy a good challenge as well.

RATING 6

Impressive landscapes and features grace this respectable racer



WINNER

TOPPING THE PODIUM THIS SEASON…

LAMBORGHINI

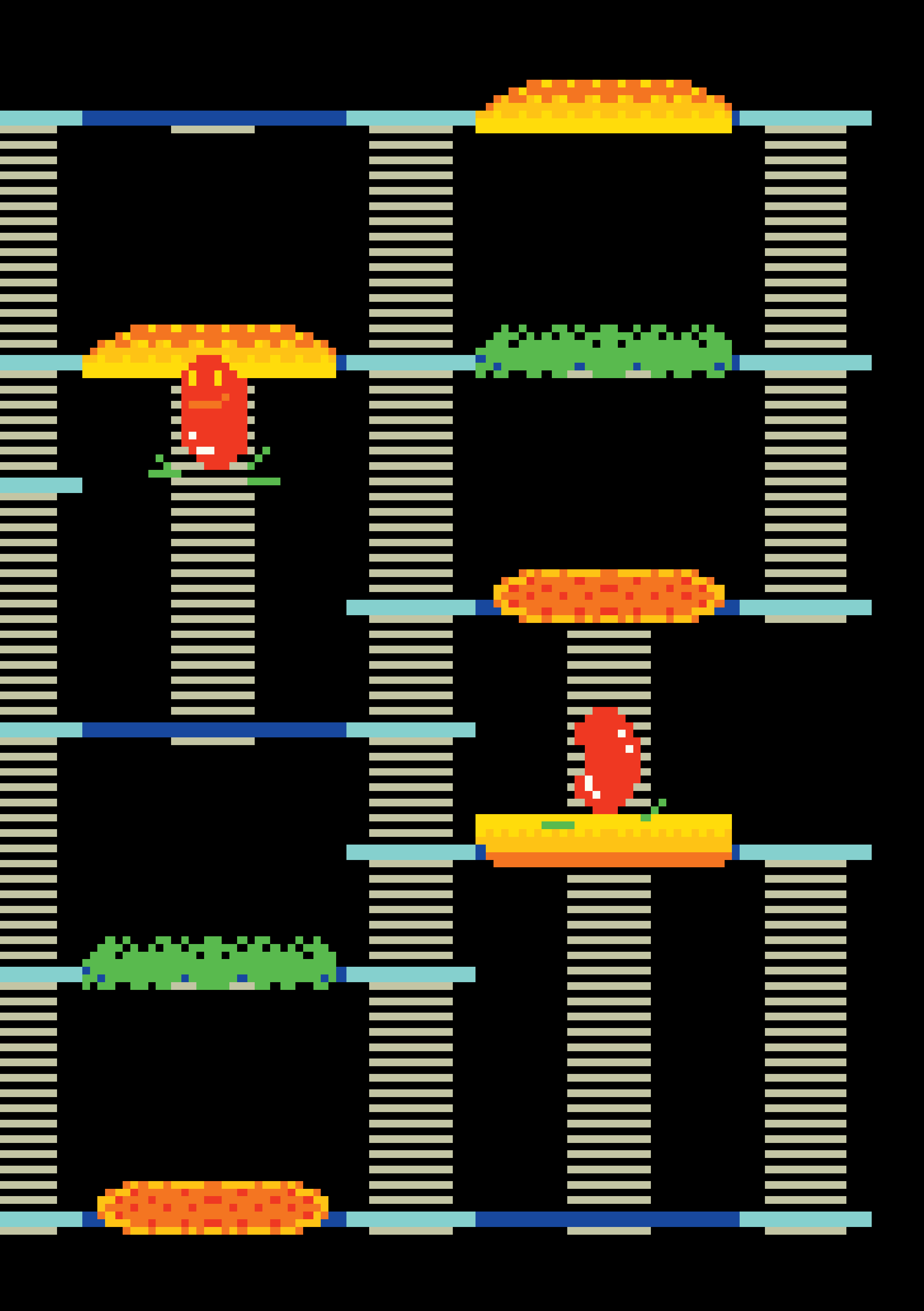
It was a close call, but the two-horse race ended in a narrow victory for the Italians. If it was more silky-smooth or immediately playable, we'd have had no qualms declaring *World Racing* the overall victor. But *Lamborghini* just stole it on the final straight. For the average gamer, the pick-up-and-play nature of this classy racer just pips the competition. Don't get us wrong – each of the three games has its own selling points. If you get to grips with the handling of *Racing Evoluzione* you may very well get great mileage out of its lengthy Dream mode. And *World Racing* is as recommendable a racer as we've seen so far on Xbox. At the end of the day, we simply felt *Lamborghini* was the tightest package of the three and, as such, it earns its place atop the **games**™ podium.

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Mine's a Whopper, hold the pickle **Burger Time Arcade [Data East] 1982**






PEPPER
5


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.3 FEBRUARY 2003
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RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
Is SEGA's classic coin-op
the best game ever?
SHINOBI
INDIANA JONES
AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM
We crack our whips in salute!
STREET FIGHTER II
Dispelling some of the great gaming myths
THIS MONTH IN 1994
3D… Oh my God!
THE GAMES THAT
TIME FORGOT
We replay Bonanza Bros. to see
if Father Time has been kind
PLUS… CLASSIC
GAMING ADS!
COMMODORE 64
MONTHLY RETRO GAMES REVIEW
DRIVING GAME
HISTORY
Gentlemen, start
your engines!

Retro

This Month In 1994



The months following all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season are famous for being a glum time for the games industry. Most big releases have come and gone and the market doesn't tend to pick up again until Easter. February 1994 was no exception, although the battle lines for the 32-bit vs 64-bit console war that was soon to be fought were already being drawn…

UK CHARTS FOR FEB 1994

1: Things Can Only Get Better
D:Ream

2: Breathe Again
Toni Braxton

3: Return To Innocence
Enigma

4: All For Love
Bryan Adams/Rod Stewart/Sting

5: The Power Of Love
Celine Dion

6: Without You
Maria Carey

7: Come Baby Come
K7

8: A Deeper Love
Aretha Franklin

9: Stay Together
Suede

10: Come In Out Of The Rain
Wendy Moten

AMIGA TOP TEN BY GALLUP

1: Frontier: Elite II
2: Premier Manager 2
3: Alien Breed 2
4: Championship Manager 94 Data Disc
5: Championship Manager 93
6: European Champions
7: Hired Guns
8: Alien Breed: SE 92
9: Goal!
10: Sensible Soccer 92/93

SNES TOP TEN BY GALLUP

1: Mario All Stars
2: Street Fighter II Turbo
3: Mortal Kombat
4: Striker
5: Zombies Ate My Neighbors
6: Kevin Keegan's Player Manager
7: Super Mario Kart
8: Super Bomberman
9: Super Kick Off
10: Krusty's Super Fun House

GAMING NEWS FEBRUARY '94

CONTENDERS, READY!

This was a strange transitional period for the games industry. Despite the arrival of a number of new consoles such as the 3DO and Jaguar, the ageing 16-bit systems (the SNES, Mega Drive and even the Amiga) were still holding up reasonably well. How so?

Well, Trip Hawkins's boasts that the 3DO console and its software would be "out there" proved to be unfounded or correct (depending on what you consider the term "out there" to mean). The machine's US launch had been met with apathy and the lack of decent games available for the '3DOA' (as some wags named it) saw many consumers returning the system within days of purchase.

Atari's '64-bit' Jaguar console was also failing to open the minds (or the wallets) of gamers – again a shameful absence of any decent games ensured that few punters were showing more than a passing interest in the console (which was due for national release in the UK the following month).

The established 16-bit machines were still ticking over, but the heyday of consoles such as the Mega Drive and SNES was slowly starting to draw to an end. Ludicrously expensive games (£60 for PAL releases was becoming increasingly common) and a glut of poor quality software was turning punters away.



For its time, the Atari Jaguar was fairly powerful. Sadly, developers and consumers were reluctant to support the machine and Atari's decision to use cartridges was somewhat misguided.



Before its arrival, the 3DO looked to be a potential contender, with a good level of support from the development community and, crucially, many of the bigger Japanese software houses.

The Amiga was also suffering due to competition from increasingly powerful (and more affordable) PC technology. Already, many industry pundits were ignoring the existing crop of machines and focusing their attention on the forthcoming battle that was set to happen between SEGA (with its Saturn) and newcomer Sony (with what it was then calling the PlayStation X or PS-X).

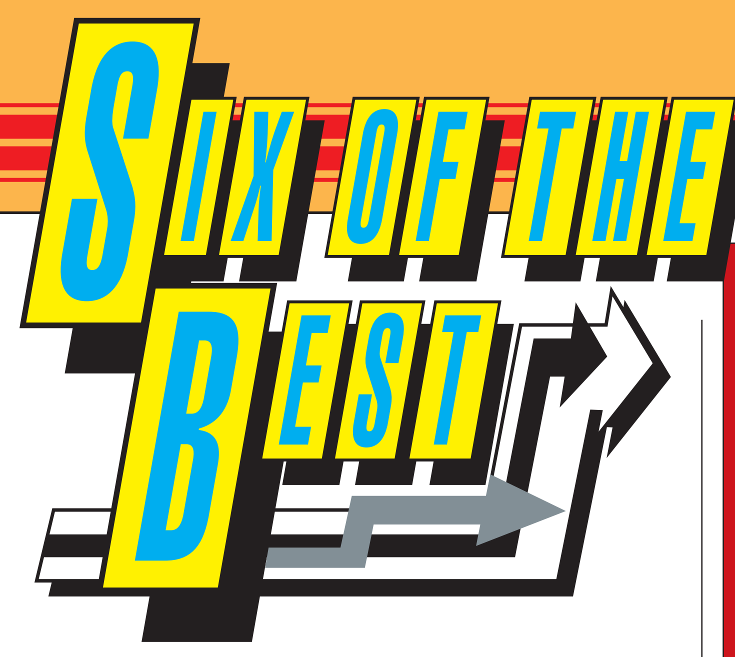
In less than 12 months the face of the industry would be changed beyond recognition: the 16-bit market would be in sharp decline and CDs had been accepted by just about everyone (except Nintendo) as the standard format for storing games. Comments such as "Only a fool would bet against SEGA" and "Sony don't understand the videogame market" would eventually leave many commentators of the time with egg on their faces, but that's another story.

WORLD NEWS

Sadly, this month was marked by several atrocities around the world. Sixty eight people were killed during a mortar attack on a Sarajevo market. The war-torn area had already seen many similar attacks and unfortunately this would not be the last. In the middle east, 29 Palestinians were massacred in a mosque in Hebron.



Six of the Best



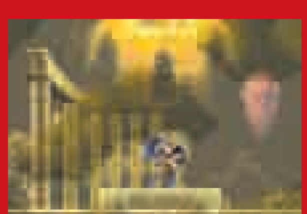
We pick out a few of the games you may (or may not) have been playing during February 1994. To say this is a fairly mixed bunch in terms of quality would be something of an understatement. Titles like *Sam & Max* and *Cannon Fodder* still had us playing away, but duds like *Mad Dog McCRee* and *Trevor McFur In Crescent Galaxy* weren't doing much for the reputations of the 'next generation' machines they were running on.

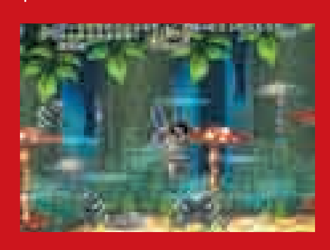
ACTRAISER 2

Format: **Super Famicom**
Publisher: **Enix**

The Japanese import version of this sequel to the excellent *Actraiser* arrived this month in '94. Unfortunately, whilst the visuals and audio were impressive enough the new game lacked the sublime blend of strategy and action that had made the original so much fun.

In fact, *Actraiser 2* only featured platform and hacking action (the God sections were gone here), making it a far less rewarding experience than its celebrated predecessor. Shame.





TREVOR McFUR IN CRESCENT GALAXY

Format: **Atari Jaguar**
Publisher: **Atari**

This lacklustre shoot-'em-up for the ill-fated Jaguar was one of the earliest releases for the system. Unfortunately, the game's suspect graphics, uninspiring sound and tedious (as well as unbalanced) gameplay failed to convince many people to rush out and buy Atari's fledgling console.

It was by no means the worst title to appear on the Jag, but the fact that it was inferior to many 16-bit console efforts was somewhat embarrassing.

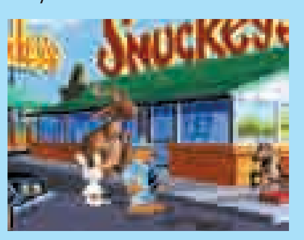


SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**

At this time the point and click adventure was still enjoying a good degree of popularity and LucasArts was, without a shadow of a doubt, master of the genre. *Sam & Max Hit The Road* was based on the comic book exploits of the eponymous heroes and ranks as one of the best-loved examples of this type of game.

Its strong lead characters, logical puzzles and lightweight sub sections (remember *Wak-A-Rat*?) won the hearts of many a gamer. A sequel is on the way in early 2004.



R-TYPE III

Format: **Super Famicom**
Publisher: **Irem**

An earlier attempt (*Super R-Type*) to bring Irem's classic shooter to the SNES was plagued by slowdown – something many early SNES releases suffered from. This later stab fared better though, with some solid level designs, good power-ups and addictive gameplay.

While the game played to the strengths of its platform (plenty of Mode 7) it still lacked the sheer genius of the coin-op original.



MAD DOG McCREE

Format: **3DO**
Publisher: **American Laser Games**

Early adopters of the 3DO had been promised a next generation gaming experience, what they actually got was rubbish like *Mad Dog McCree*.

This conversion was doomed to failure on the 3DO as the lack of a lightgun peripheral for the machine meant gamers had to use a pad to play (nice one). Some horrendous loading delays – which frequently brought the 'action' to a standstill – didn't help much either.







CANNON FODDER

Format: **Amiga**
Publisher: **Virgin**

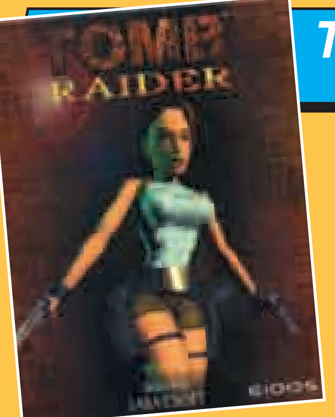
Sensible Software's classic wargame, although released before *C&C*, combined elements of Westwood Studio's title with ideas from classic coin-ops such as *Jackal* and *Ikari Warriors* (being able to utilise nearby vehicles, for example). The result of this fusion was an immensely playable Amiga game, which was subsequently ported over to a number of other home systems.



War, as they say, may be hell, but there's no denying it does make for terribly good videogames and even the most cold-hearted of gamers must have shed the odd tear after losing a long-serving soldier.

LOOK BACK 'N ANGER

Along with Mario, Sonic and Pac-Man, Lara Croft ranks as one of the most celebrated videogame characters of all time. But why? Come on, admit it, *Tomb Raider* (and those pesky follow ups) was, is and always will be awful.



TOMB RAIDER
...featuring Lara Croft

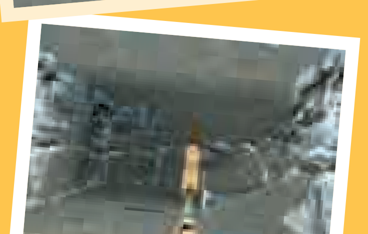
Despite what the marketing men employed by the games industry might say, the majority of people who play videogames are spotty teenage males, who, incidentally, have trouble talking to members of the opposite sex. Indeed, to paraphrase Jona Lewie: "You'll always find me/us/you in the kitchen at parties". Don't write in complaining about our stereotyping of gamers, because that last statement is a scientific fact (or something like that) and if you still don't believe us take a look in that mirror right now. See that pasty, sun-shunning skin, do you? Well, do you? Of course you do. Now pick up that stiffened sports sock lying next to your bed and throw it away before mother sees it. Thank you.

Anyway, when Core unleashed Lara 'big-bosomed speleologist who likes shooting animals' Croft onto an unsuspecting public in 1996, her posh accent combined with her, erm, ample assets ensured that publisher Eidos enjoyed great success with the title. In fact, it's fair to say that the first videogame to feature Ms Croft (yes, for you at the back, we're talking about *Tomb Raider* and its tawdry spin-offs) proved to be a right royal money-spinner.

Now, we probably run the risk of being crucified for saying this, but in spite of the all the plaudits heaped on the original game, we here at **games**™ thought it was little more than a sub-standard *Prince Of Persia* clone wrapped up in a (for the time) mildly impressive 3D engine.

Admittedly, some might say that comparing Core's effort to Jordan Mechner's classic game is tantamount to describing *Halo* as a glorified *Wolfenstein 3D* clone. Well, to those people we say: "Either strut your stuff or bog off".

So why do we so hate *Tomb Raider*? Where to start? We could fill a tome the size of a telephone directory with criticisms. Sadly, page counts dictate that only a few of our gripes can make it into this piece (see below).



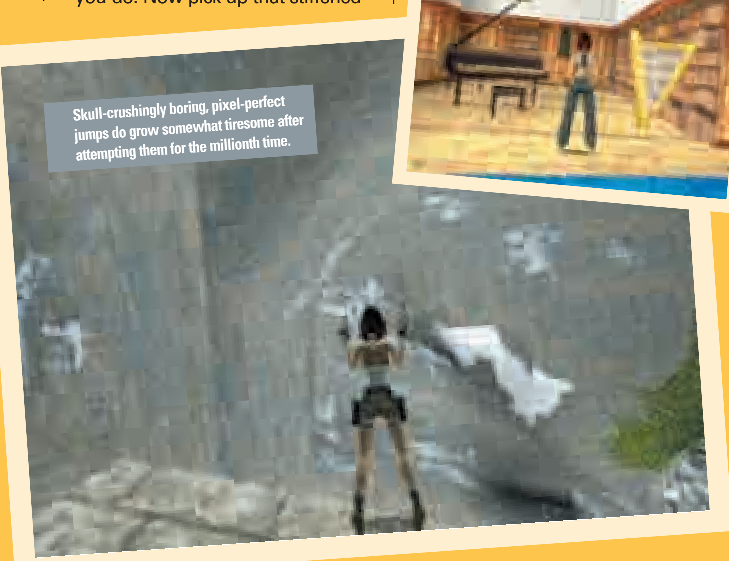
For the last time Lara is not a real woman. REPEAT, LARA IS NOT A REAL WOMAN. Now wash your hands.

The case against

The original *Tomb Raider*, and, by turn, Lara herself, represented the most base exploitation of the teenage male market we can recall (even the *Leisure Suit Larry* games showed more taste). The crushingly dull *Tomb Raider* sequels were even worse, although on the evidence of a press release we found in a bin last year (before we'd seen the game in motion) *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* shows "a lot of promise".

Of course, if this latest sequel doesn't do well then we'll bet our bottom dollar that Lara will, shortly after, be making an appearance in her very own comedy karting game where she drives around wacky landscapes firing red shells at wolves, bears and wasps. Keep reading the news section of this magazine for more info on the latter title.





Skull-crushingly boring, pixel-perfect jumps do grow somewhat tiresome after attempting them for the millionth time.



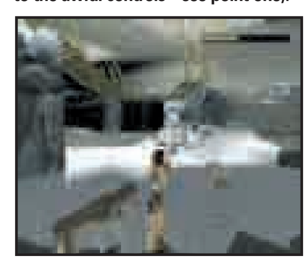
WE HATE LARA BECAUSE....

1 The controls were as stodgy as one of grandma's suet puddings. If we want to slowly creep up against the edge of a large grid-like platform, only to step a little too far forward and plummet to our doom, then we'll go out (for no charge, we might add) and slowly creep up against the edge of a large grid-like platform only to step a little too far forward and plummet to our doom.

2 Shooting wolves/bears/wasps by holding down a button and then jumping around a bit is about as much fun as buffing your own pylon with a scourer. If we want to go out and shoot wolves/bears/wasps by holding down a button and jumping around a bit then we'll… (Yes, yes, we get the idea – Ed).

3 *Mario 64* (which was, by the way, immensely overrated – rescuing baby penguins anyone?) had come out before it and done 3D platforming so much better.

4 That bloody grunt she made when she hit a wall (which happened almost every minute due, in part, to the awful controls – see point one).



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

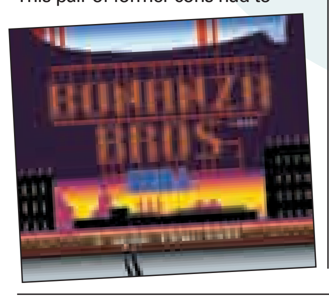
This month we take a look back at SEGA's visually stunning and highly original steal-'em-up Bonanza Bros.

BONANZA BROS.

Format: **Arcade (first), various home conversions**
Manufacturer: **SEGA**
Year: **1990 (home conversions later)**

When SEGA released its hugely underrated *Bonanza Bros.* coin-op in 1990 it couldn't claim to have pioneered burglary-based gaming – Alligata's *Blagger*, among others, had got there a lot earlier. However, while the title's premise may not have been wholly original its quirky gameplay most certainly was.

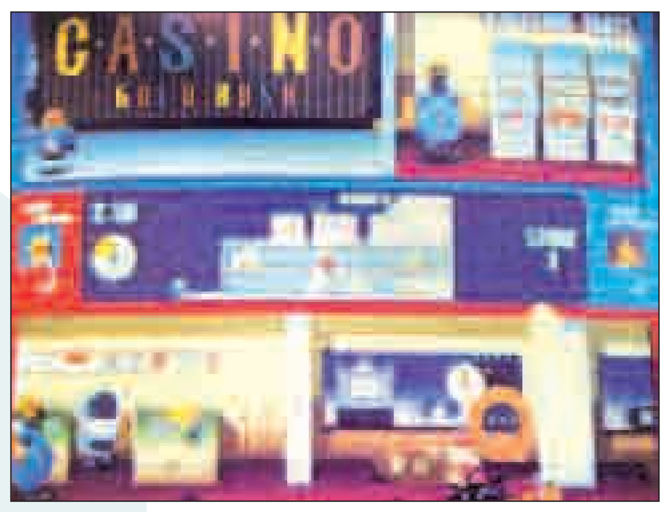
Having been employed by a shady character to test the security of his properties, one or two players took control of Robo and Mobo, the brothers of the title. This pair of former cons had to loot a number of heavily guarded pseudo-2D locations (including banks, casinos and mansions) whilst avoiding detection. With the requisite stolen items in their possession, escape could be made via a blimp anchored at the top of each building.





Home conversions (including the MegaDrive port) lacked the original's flair.

The game screen was divided into three horizontal strips – the top and bottom of these displayed the current surroundings of each brother, while the thinner middle strip contained a shared map that showed the players' location within the building as a whole. As progress was made, the guards you were trying to evade became increasingly vigilant and although each player possessed a stun-gun that could momentarily daze certain foes, the name of the game here was stealth.



This photo may not show it, but the arcade version of *Bonanza Bros.* featured some extremely stylised 2D visuals.

The beautiful 2D locations allowed players to tuck themselves up against walls and hide behind parts of the scenery while foes strolled past oblivious to their presence. Learning the guards' patrol patterns was pivotal to success and good timing was required to make your way through the tricky later stages. In addition to the roving guards, innocuous items such as rakes (step on these and they smacked you in the face, temporarily stunning you) also had to be avoided. The game was later ported to a number of home systems – including SEGA's own MegaDrive – but none of the conversions could match the sumptuous visuals and catchy music generated by the coin-op's System 24 hardware. Here's hoping that a perfect translation may appear on a retro compilation in the future as the original isn't currently supported by any coin-op emulators.

Presentation	80%
Graphics	92%
Playability	90%
Addictive qualities	90%
OVERALL	**90%**

The screen was divided so that you could follow the progress of each brother. The bar in the middle had a handy map in case you got lost while out on the blag.

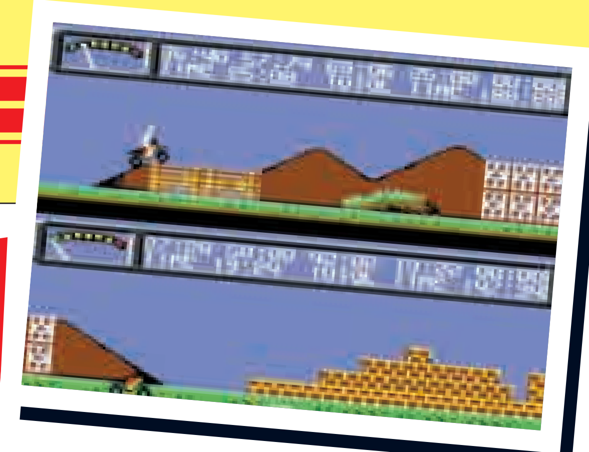


If spotted by the patrolling security guards your best bet was to scarper and try to hide yourself away until the enemies went back to their normal patterns.





Why Don't They Remake?



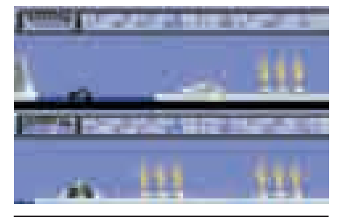
K•I•K•S•T•A•R•T II – THE CONSTRUCTION SET

Back in the golden days of videogaming you didn't need cheap gimmicks such as unlockable footage of naked girls to sell your games – titles stood or fell on their gameplay merits. It may be almost 16 years old but Mastertronic's Kikstart II (which remains highly playable today) is surely a title aching for a next generation makeover.

Released: **1987**
Publisher: **Mastertronic**
Developer: **Mr Chip Software (Shaun Southern, Andrew Morris and Peter Liggett)**
Format: **Commodore 64, Spectrum, Amstrad CPC**



Wreckless riding saw your character being hurled from his bike, resulting in a frustrating wait until you could remount.



Races took place in both daylight and night-time conditions. Certain stages were also covered in snow, making things even trickier.

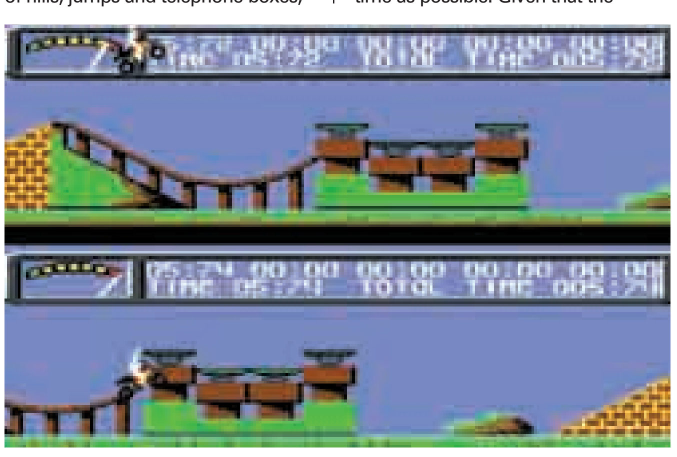
Following the success of the original *Kikstart: Off-Road Simulator* (1985), Shaun Southern came up with an exceptionally enjoyable sequel, which incorporated a fine construction set option into the bargain. This feature allowed creative gamers to design their own stages – you could construct a course made entirely out of hills, jumps and telephone boxes, or even leave a stage totally flat for speed trials.

In case you're not familiar with the *Kikstart* games, one or two players rode scrambler bikes over a series of obstacle packed locations via a 2D split-screen display. Racing against either a human or computer controlled rival the object was to get to the end of each level in as short a time as possible. Given that the *Kikstart* games were budget releases it's remarkable to think that both were far superior to many of the full price titles of their day.

The gameplay mechanics were simple enough – accelerate, brake, wheelie and jump – but the way players had to approach each obstacle in a different fashion lent the action a surprising level of depth. Fences and tyres had to be taken slowly or you risked being thrown unceremoniously from your machine, whilst ski jumps and hills could be used to elevate your vehicle over telephone boxes and suchlike.

With two equally matched players, races could be tense affairs that often went down to the wire. Fans of the game will no doubt recall the agonising wait after a crash as the screen scrolled slowly onwards to the next flat section of track where it repositioned you.

A few *Kikstart* clones followed, but the series remains in the past. Hopefully some shrewd publisher will pick up the rights to *Kikstart II* and commission a new next-gen version.



The split-screen view let you keep track of your opponent (and let them see your pitiful mistakes).

CONSTRUCTION TIME AGAIN

The inclusion of a stage construction option added a whole new element to the action. Once you'd tired of the pre-designed levels you could design your own courses for you and your friends to race on.

This feature was well implemented and easy to use, allowing you to get on with the task in hand – namely creating the most fiendish track you could imagine; a telephone box here, some bumpy ground there and a few springs just to finish things off.

Indeed, while revisiting *Kikstart II* hours flew by as we tinkered about with ramps, bumps and hills.

Needless to say, this feature added greatly to the game's lifespan. Fine stuff.



Using the construction set was a breeze and complex stages could be designed in minutes.



Items were selected with the simple press of a key button; the size of certain obstacles could be tinkered with too.

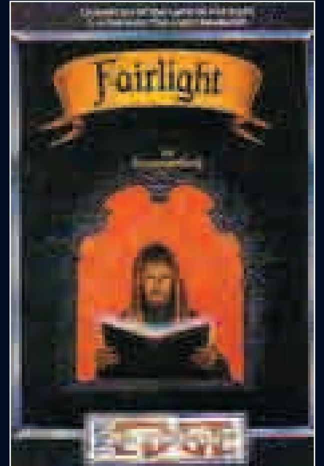
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN…

We reminisce about things from the videogame industry of yesteryear which have sadly disappeared from the gaming scene

GAMES ON CASSETTE TAPES

If your first experience of videogames came with the arrival of cartridge-based systems such as the Master System or NES then the bittersweet experience of games being stored on standard cassettes will no doubt be lost on you. Waiting ten minutes for *Fairlight*, for example, to load in (Lord, did that game ever take its sweet time) with only a static loading screen to entertain you was a truly tense experience, and not knowing if the program would crash at the last minute provided thrills that few modern titles could compete with.

Worse still were the multi-loaders (if you weren't there, don't ask). Generally speaking they were less reliable than a rust-riddled Vauxhall Viva with 200,000 miles on the clock.



Fortunately (unless you were a publisher), there was a flipside to all this. You see, less scrupulous gamers could copy their mates' entire game collections onto a blank C-90 tape, thus saving them vast sums of money. Naturally, we at **games**™ – being the God-fearing sorts we are – never indulged in such shenanigans.

Anyway, as far as we're concerned you can take your DVD storage medium and shove it. Here's hoping Sony reverts to old-fashioned cassette storage for its next PlayStation.

LAST MONTH'S MEGADRIVE SCREENS NAMED

Well, we've had plenty of calls and emails about last month's spread of MegaDrive screens (actually that's a complete lie. One chap did ring us, but he thought we were a taxi firm). Anyway, from left to right, starting from the top, the games were:

FIRST ROW
SEGA logo
Musha Aleste
Alex Kidd: In The Enchanted Castle
Alien 3
Alien Storm
Zombies Ate My Neighbors
Sonic 3D Blast
Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
Blue Almanac
Bulls vs Lakers

SECOND ROW
Alisia Dragoon
Altered Beast
Atomic Runner (Chelnov)
Booger Man
Body Count
Chakan: The Forever Man
Columns
Contra: Hard Corps
Desert Strike
Dick Tracy

THIRD ROW
Cadash
Captain America And The Avengers
Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
Cool Spot
Crack Down
Dune – The Battle For Arrakis
Dynamite Duke
Dynamite Headdy
E-Swat Cyber Police
Ecco The Dolphin

FOURTH ROW
Eternal Champions
Earnest Evans
Flashback
Greendog
Gynoug
F22-Interceptor
FIFA International Soccer
Fist Of The North Star
Flicky
Golden Axe

FIFTH ROW
Hellfire
Insector X
Jungle Strike
Mercs
Phelios
Gunstar Heroes
Herzog Zwei
Joe Montana Football
Kid Chameleon
McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure

SIXTH ROW
Phantasy Star II
Pit Fighter
Quack Shot Starring Donald Duck
Rambo III
Rastan Saga II
Micro Machines
Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
Mutant League Football
NHL Hockey 91
Rocket Knight Adventures

SEVENTH ROW
Road Rash
Shadow Dancer
The Revenge of Shinobi
Sonic The Hedgehog
Streets of Rage
Rolling Thunder 3
Shining Force
Sonic & Knuckles
Space Harrier II
Sonic Spinball

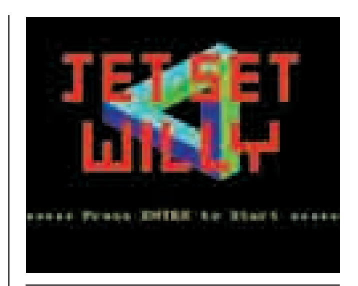
EIGHTH ROW
Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin
Strider II
Taz-Mania
Taz In Escape From Mars
Zero Wing
Splatterhouse 2
Star Control
Toejam & Earl 2: Panic On Funkotron
Tiny Toons: Buster's Hidden Treasure
Aladdin

GREAT GAME BOSSES



MARIA: JET SET WILLY

Format: **Spectrum, C64, various 8-bit formats**
Publisher **Software Projects**
Developer: **Matthew Smith**
Year: **1984**



If the clock reached midnight the timer reset itself, allowing you to carry on with the task in hand. Blimey.

The videogame universe is populated by some of the most menacing bosses you could imagine. Whether it be huge, chainsaw-wielding zombies, fire-spitting dragons or massive attack ships (probably on fire off the shoulder of Orion), most games chuck some kind of super tough character in your direction. However, the memory of all these bosses will be lost in time, like tears in rain, when compared to the sheer terror generated by a rather butch housekeeper known as Maria. Oh yes, as videogame bosses go, Miner Willy's disgruntled housemaid must rank as one of the toughest bosses in history.

The title she appeared in was, of course, *Jet Set Willy*, where she blocked the entrance to our hero's bedroom. To paraphrase Kyle Reese in *The Terminator*: "Maria was out there! She couldn't be bargained with. She couldn't be reasoned with. She didn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And she absolutely would not stop, ever (well maybe after the game's time limit has expired), until you'd cleaned your newly acquired fancy mansion".

While most bosses give up the ghost after taking a few laser blasts to the head or suchlike, Maria was made of tougher stuff. Before she would make herself scarce, poor Willy (who was suffering from a demon of a hangover) had to collect every piece of rubbish left over from the previous night's raucous party. This meant exploring every last inch of his strange mansion whilst avoiding its bizarre denizens. Only when every last bit of trash had been collected could Willy retire to the comfort of his bed (not that it turned out that way in the end).

No doubt about it, Maria was an intimidating guardian. But the question that always got us was why didn't Willy save himself all the hassle and just fire her? Answers on a postcard please…



As you entered the Master Bedroom, Maria stood on guard. If you tried to barge past her Willy lost a precious life.

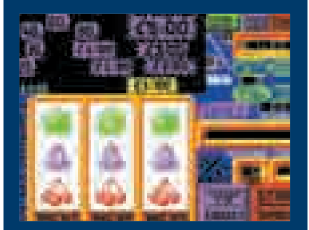


THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

Onto issue 3 and the deadlines seem to be getting shorter. But we managed to unwind with this lot…

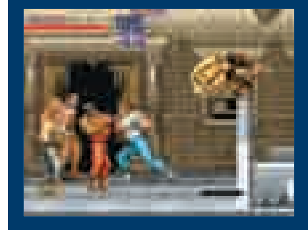
FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATOR

Codemasters (1987) There's something oddly therapeutic about pumping money into a virtual fruit machine (even if you can't win cash).



FINAL FIGHT

Capcom (1989) It may not offer staggeringly subtle gameplay, but the fantastic character design and fluid fight action still managed to keep us enthralled.



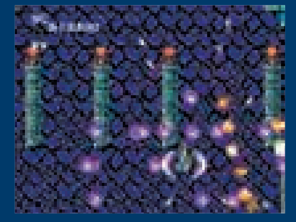
KIKSTART II

Mastertronic (1987) This budget-priced motorcycle game is a damn sight more entertaining than a great deal of the dross that comes into the office each month.



GUNHED

Hudson Soft (1989) Hudson Soft's classy PC Engine shooter is up there with the best. Great visuals and non-stop action combine for a real adrenaline rush.





A Great RETRO Gaming Moment

I·N·D·I·A·N·A J·O·N·E·S

A·N·D T·H·E T·E·M·P·L·E O·F D·O·O·M

WE WALK FROM HERE...

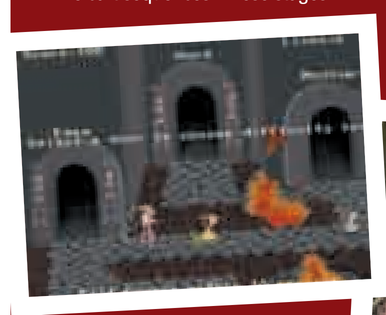
Format(s): **Coin-op (first), various conversions followed**
Manufacturer: **Atari**
Release date: **1985**

Mine cart sequences are usually the last refuge of the unoriginal development team, but this section from the classic *Indy* coin-op was a notable exception. Based on the movie of the same name, this ageing coin-op from Atari stands as one of the more accomplished film tie-ins tucked within the annals of videogame history. The game itself was split into a number of sub-stages, including rescuing caged kids from Thuggee guards, swiping the Sankara stones from the Temple's altar and making your escape along a rope bridge.

However, most players will remember this title for the excellent mine cart sequences. These stages saw Indy jumping into a carriage and then speeding through the mine whilst using his trusty whip to cause as much carnage and mayhem as possible. Thuggee guards pursued you in other carts, but these bearded foes could be dealt with in a number of ways. Simply whipping them was the most obvious solution but in addition to this, canny players could exploit nearby items such as oil drums and rock piles to block off sections of the track behind them.

The music in these sections was up to the high standards set in the rest of the game and if you could make it to the end of the mine unscathed then you got to hear Indy utter the immortal words: "We walk from here".

Sadly, the home conversions lacked the visual and audio oomph of their coin-op predecessor, so if you want to experience the mine cart sequence as God intended then you'll need to track down the original machine. Trust us, it's worth it.



With a new *Indy* game coming soon on next-gen consoles, what better time to go back to our favourite archaeologist's be-hatted roots?

STEP ONE
Having rescued the kids, it's time to escape down the mine.



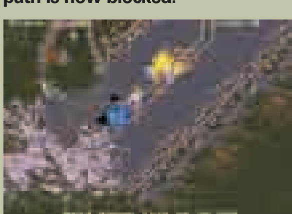
STEP TWO
Thuggee guards are soon hot on your tracks – best start moving it.



STEP THREE
Fortunately, nearby items can be whipped to create chaos…



STEP FOUR
The pursuing Thuggee guards' path is now blocked.



STEP FIVE
Altogether now: "We walk from here"



SAMANTHA FOX STRIP POKER (Spectrum 48K/128K, Amstrad) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, April 1986

Retro

Classic Machine

SPECIFICATIONS

Though bulkier than its Sinclair rival, there was no doubt that the C64 packed the meaner punch.

Processor	6510
Speed	1MHz
RAM	64Kb
Size	404 x 216 x 75mm
Weight	1280g

WHY DID THE C64 HAVE TO PLAY SECOND FIDDLE TO THE SPECTRUM? IT WAS GREAT…

Though many agree that the Spectrum was the 'Daddy' of home computers, there's an equally large group of old-school gamers who'd argue otherwise and not without good reason.

You see, while the Spectrum was massively popular in the UK, it was the Commodore 64 that went on to become the world's most popular 8-bit home computer. Launched in America in 1982, the C64 (as it became more widely known) was the successor to Commodore's first home computer outing, the VIC 20. Initially, the C64 was seen as overpriced – particularly in the UK – where the hefty £400 price tag was deemed a tad expensive in a market where the inferior (in terms of processing power) Spectrum 48K was much more competitively priced. All that changed in 1984 though, when the C64's price was lowered to a more reasonable £200.

It was this decrease that sparked the war of the home computers that would rage until the end of the decade only to finally peter out the early Nineties.

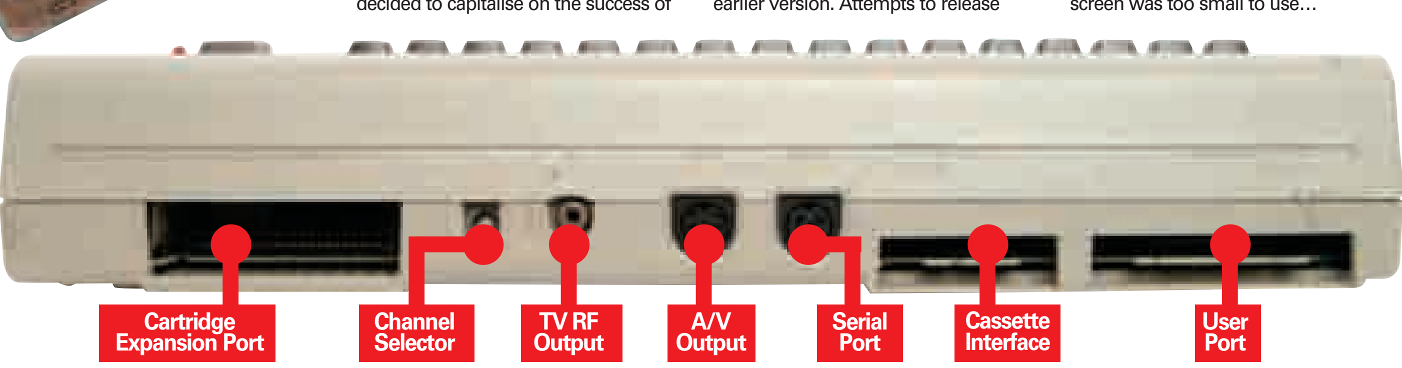
commodore

A WHITER SHADE OF, ER, OFF-WHITE

The first C64s were off-white in colour, bearing a strong similarity to their predecessor. This soon changed (presumably to distance the computer from its older sibling), and the brown version seen above is best remembered. However, as the C64 became more successful, CBM (Commodore Business Machines) decided to capitalise on the success of the brand by releasing different versions of the machine.

The C128 was more powerful than its predecessor but didn't take off as developers preferred to design for the C64 and its large installed user base. The C128 had a C64 mode for running the older machine's software, but it still failed to match the sales of the earlier version. Attempts to release variants of the C64 were also mired by the fact they either weren't compatible with the C64 or were seen as lesser versions of the original.

Poor product design also played a part. For example, the SX64 (left) – a portable C64 complete with 5-inch screen and disk drive – didn't have a rechargeable battery (d'oh!) and the screen was too small to use…



KEY GAMES

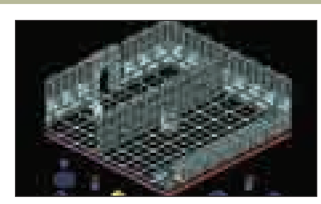
There were many crossovers between the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC range and the Commodore, but these are our favourite games for the C64

THE SENTINEL



Widely regarded as an all-time classic, Geoff Crammond's perfectly executed and unique game enthralled C64 users back in 1986. This strategy game featured 10,000 levels pitting you, the Synthoid, against the threat of the eponymous Sentinel. Taking the Synthoid, you had to make your way toward the Sentinel while remaining undetected in an electronic game of cat and mouse. Detection meant that the Synthoid's energy would be drained, so making your way to a position where you could see the square that was home to your foe (and thus drain the Sentinel's own power) was devilishly difficult. Fancy repeating the process a thousand times? No? Thanks to some blindingly addictive gameplay and stunning graphics (for its time), plenty of people tried…

HEAD OVER HEELS



For those of a certain age, the isometric puzzle games of Bernie Drummond and Jon Ritman were, and remain, really rather special. *Batman* had demonstrated what the two were capable of but it was *Head Over Heels* that took the genre to new heights. Released in 1987, the game placed you in control of two characters, Head and Heels. Each had special abilities that you had to use independently to access rooms containing the requisite tough-as-a-toughened-nut puzzles. However, at some points you could actually combine the two (hence the title of the game) which merged their abilities to enable you to tackle yet more of the 301 locations on offer. Beautiful to look at and harder than steel, it remains a true classic that we'd love to see return…

WIZBALL



It's a game about a wizard who's trapped in a ball – geddit? Another Ocean classic and certainly one of **games**™'s favourite games of 1987, here you had to do battle with Zark, who had drained your world of colour. Your mission (with the aid of your cat) was to restore colour to each of the increasingly challenging levels. It was essentially a shoot-'em-up, the twist being that you had to learn how to control said ball-shaped wizard. Mastering this bouncy magician took some doing, but as the level of difficulty increased you were also awarded much-needed power-ups. A triumph for original gaming, *Wizball* combined gorgeous graphics by Mark Jones with some impressive music and sound effects.



PERIPHERALS AND ADD-ONS



As is the case with most hardware, the Commodore 64 was home to a surprising number of peripherals and add-ons to help keep pace with changing times and needs of its users. As the machine was supposed to be a home computer, many of these were tailored to serve more serious purposes.

The C64 could happily support a printer, a housebrick-sized 170K floppy disk drive and a Datasette. However, a modem was also released as well as a mouse, which made playing *Arkanoid* even more of a joy. Most importantly, the C64 had two joystick ports, which is all that really mattered.

"WHY I LOVE THE COMMODORE 64"

My first real glimpse of the eye-stinging ultra-colourful world of the sublime Commodore 64 was playing *Rocket Ball* and then *Knight Games* at Mark Tyrie's house. I simply couldn't believe the difference in quality between this sumptuous block of fudge and my faithful old ZX Spectrum, which by now had gone through its second keyboard membrane and fifteenth Quickshot microswitch joystick.

I was determined to join the C64 club and fortune smiled on me – during work experience in the Computer Cabin (now a flower shop), I discovered a forgotten pre-order still in the box. Up the jumper, down the fire escape and away, as they say.

Before the fuse blew and I upgraded to an Atari ST and then MegaDrive, my hearing-aid-beige wonder allowed me to sample the delights of *Psi-5 Trading Company*, *Uridium*, *Paradroid*, *Wizball*, *Zak McKracken*, *Buggy Boy*, *Gunship*, *Armalyte*, *Law Of The West* and my favourite, *Bubble Bobble*. And of course, if you download the appropriate emulator you can now enjoy the delights of all these games without the tape loading hassle. Bliss.

Damian Butt



commodore 64


BARBARIAN II



DON'T GO CHANGING

And the award for the worst Western adaptation of a Japanese game goes to…

STREET COMBAT (IREM)

(RANMA 1/2 PART 1)

The *Ranma 1/2* series centres on the exploits of a young fellow called Ranma Saotome, a lad who gets into all manner of scrapes, most of which are resolved via martial arts combat.

The twist is that Ranma has been cursed in a rather unusual fashion – should he come into contact with cold water he transforms into his female alter ego and can only revert back to his male form if he's splashed with hot water. Naturally, this sort of gender-bending hilarity provided rich source material for some spin-off videogames and it comes as no surprise that Ranma made several appearances in pixellated form.

One of the more memorable titles in which s/he appeared was the 1992 Super Famicom beat-'em-up *Ranma Chonai Gekitosen* (*Ranma 1/2 Part 1*). The game was a fairly decent *Street Fighter II* clone that benefited heavily from the strong characters contained within.

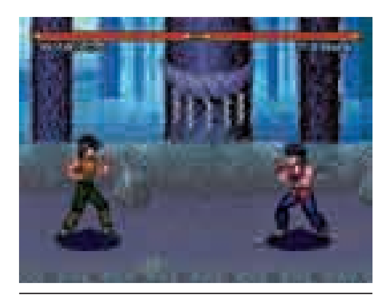


Welcome to the far superior Japanese original – we hope you enjoy your stay.

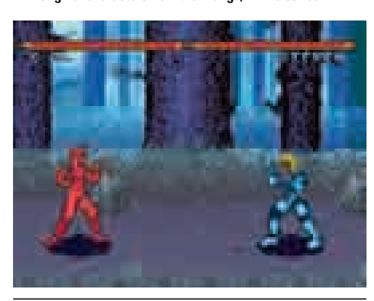
Sadly, someone in the US branch of Irem (which published the game in America) failed to pick up on the charm of the characters and when the game hit US stores it appeared with a different name and a horrific new look.

Street Combat as the US translation travesty was called, played the same as its Japanese counterpart, but in the place of characters such as Ranma and Genma you now had dire-looking Westernised brawlers with names like Steven, C.J. and Tyrone. Changing character names is one thing, but it was difficult to forgive the horrific visual overhaul the game had cruelly suffered.

The aforementioned C.J. resembled the product of an unholy union between a Power Ranger and a Tellytubby. To put things in perspective, it's like Sony releasing *PaRappa The Rapper* in the West with a bronzed, body-building and highly homoerotic central protagonist called Greg Strong. In a nutshell: America took something that was beautiful and made it dirty. Cheers ya'll…



Here we can see the Japanese version, complete with original characters from the Manga/Anime series.



Hey presto, our American chums have better ideas. Say hello to C.J. and Steven. Damn those pesky Yanks.

VIDEOGAMES MYTHS



An intriguing batch of combat game cobblers

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR

Videogame myths have been knocking around since the days of *Pong*. However, when Capcom released *Street Fighter II* in 1991 a whole flood of facts and fancies started flowing.

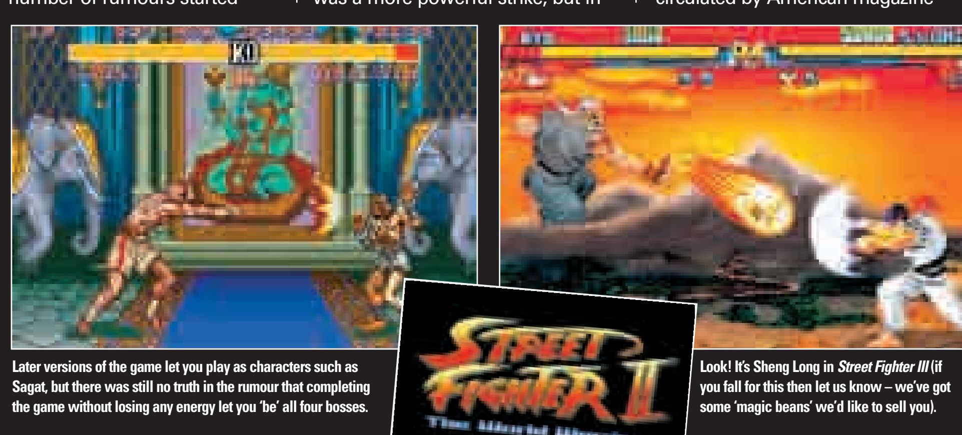
It's fair to say that *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* was a phenomenon. Not since the golden age of coin-ops when *Pac-Man* and suchlike were doing the rounds had an arcade machine been so popular. As players became more and more skilled at the game they began to demand more, and before long a number of rumours started doing the rounds – most of which proved to be a pack of ill-conceived (and daft) lies.

To list them all you'd need pages, but some of the more popular ones included the so-called Super Fireball. Those of you who played the game enough may have noticed that from time to time Ryu and Ken's Hadoken attack would appear in an orangey red form. It was suggested that this was a more powerful strike, but in reality it was simply a graphical glitch (as confirmed by the developers) – case closed.

Then you had the classic 'if you complete the game without losing any energy you can select the four bosses as playable characters'. After much time and money had been spent it emerged that this was a big fat dirty lie.

Best of all though was the story circulated by American magazine *EGM*. As an April Fool's joke, the magazine ran an article (complete with a dodgy doctored image) which appeared to show a hidden character in action. The fighter in question was Sheng Long, the supposed mentor of Ryu and Ken (the name Sheng Long was incidentally included in Ryu's victory speech). *EGM* explained that in order to unlock this character you had to reach M. Bison without getting hit and then go nine (count 'em) rounds without either you or Bison hitting each another. Of course this was utter guff, but that didn't stop people trying, and one or two rival publications were left with egg on their faces (or should that be covers?) after plagiarising the story.

The hoax was later revived by *EGM* when it claimed that Sheng Long was included in *Street Fighter III: The New Generation* (again this turned out to be untrue). The one that really bakes our noodle is whether Capcom intentionally included combos in *Street Fighter II*. We suspect not, but hey, who are we to judge?



Later versions of the game let you play as characters such as Sagat, but there was still no truth in the rumour that completing the game without losing any energy let you 'be' all four bosses.

Look! It's Sheng Long in *Street Fighter III* (if you fall for this then let us know – we've got some 'magic beans' we'd like to sell you).



LASER SQUAD (Amiga, Atari ST, C64, Amstrad CPC, Spectrum, MSX, PC) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, Nov 1989

SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

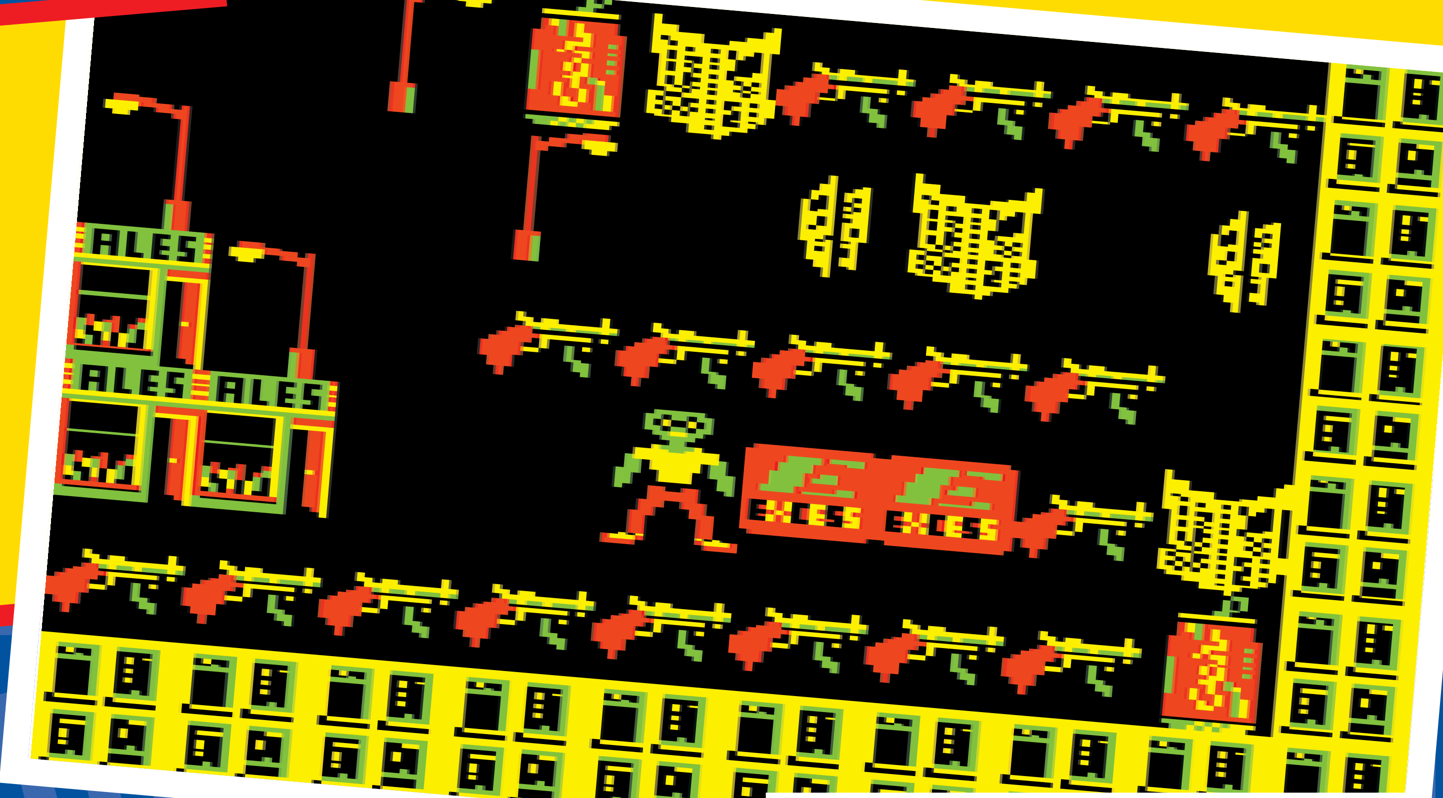
THE GOOD OLD BBC MICRO AND ACORN ELECTRON WERE OFTEN OVERLOOKED BY MANY OF THE LARGER SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS. FORTUNATELY, A NUMBER OF FIRMS MADE THESE SYSTEMS THEIR DEVELOPMENT PLATFORMS OF CHOICE AND CONSEQUENTLY, THE MACHINES ENJOYED A HEALTHY RANGE OF SOFTWARE. PERHAPS THE MOST PROLIFIC AND SUCCESSFUL OF THESE SOFTWARE HOUSES WAS SUPERIOR SOFTWARE, WHICH WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HITS SUCH AS CITADEL, EXILE AND, OF COURSE, REPTON. JOIN GAMES™ AS IT LOOKS BACK AT THE HISTORY OF SUPERIOR SOFTWARE AND SOME OF ITS GREATEST GAMES…

While studying for a BSc in Computational Science at Leeds University, Richard Hanson purchased an Acorn Atom computer and began to program games and utilities for the machine. By the time Richard had completed his course, over 17 of his titles had been published by Program Power (which would later become more famous as Micro Power). Spurred on by the success of the games he'd had published, the young graduate formed his own software house in the summer of 1982 and called it Superior Software. Richard and fellow graduate John Dyson put £50 each into funding the firm and then

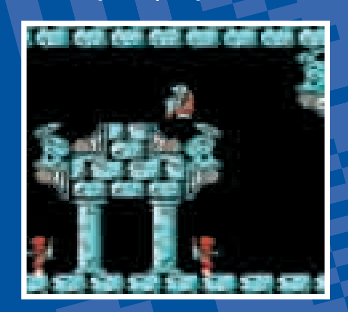


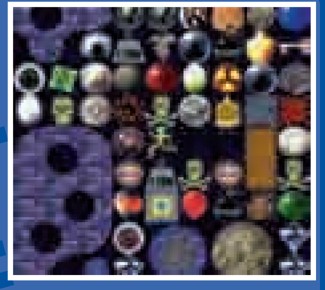
Not all of Superior's output was game-based. For example the utility programme *Speech!* allowed users to type commands into the machine, which it would then speak in broken English. To a teenage boy, the ability to make your computer produce, er, blue language was most appealing.

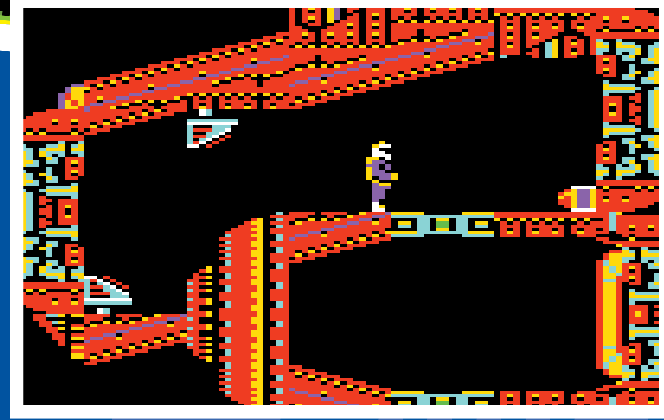




Life after *Repton* – Tim Tyler still does a bit of coding and since the Superior days he's created (among other things) a new puzzle game called *Rockz* (below right). It's rather good, you know.







Sim City on the BBC? Yes, believe it or not it did happen. Now that's what we call smart coding.

coded three games and one game respectively, which were ready to be published by the autumn of 1982.

Using the £100 at its disposal, Superior Software took out a small black and white advert in one of the early computer magazines of the day. The games proved successful and Superior made back the money it had spent on the initial ad (and quite a bit more). With the profits it had made the firm took out larger ads and before long found itself accepting work from other programmers for publication under the Superior label.

HEALTHY COMPETITION

Of course, the firm wasn't the only company competing in the BBC/Electron software market. There were Acornsoft and Micro Power, both of which specialised on the Acorn systems. All three firms produced some excellent software and whilst the competition between them was fierce it was, according to Hanson, good-natured.

With a clutch of hits to its name, Superior had soon become the largest player in the BBC software market and in 1986 it won the contract to republish a number of titles by Acornsoft (which by this point wanted to focus on hardware), including classics such as *Elite* and *Revs*. In addition to this it also struck up deals to port other firms' games to the BBC Micro and Electron.

By 1987, the BBC top ten charts were dominated by Superior's products and Richard Hanson found himself at the helm of a company with an annual turnover of nearly £1 million (impressive considering the initial £100 outlay used to start the firm). It's also worth noting that a number of high-profile developers spent time at Superior – for example, Martin Edmondson of Reflections coded a selection of titles for the outfit. In typically modest fashion, Richard Hanson attributes much of his firm's success to the quality work and dedication of the people whom he employed.





Galaforce was one of Superior's best-loved releases and an update is currently in the works. Suffice to say, if the new game captures the spirit of the original then we'll certainly be picking up a copy.



SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

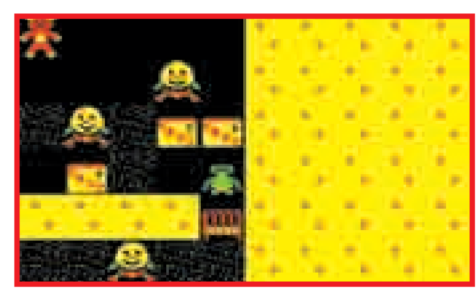
It is testament to the high quality of Superior Software's games that the firm continued to enjoy success in the BBC Micro market, even as the machine's popularity was going into decline. Of course, as the videogame markets began to change many software publishers that had flourished during the mid- and late Eighties began to suffer somewhat in the Nineties.

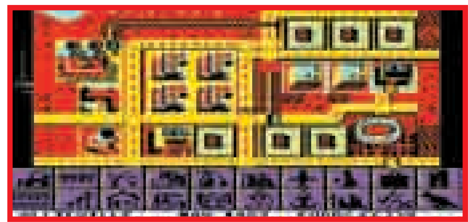
The good news is that unlike many publishers Superior Software is still with us today, trading under the new name of Superior Interactive for PC software, and under the original Superior Software name for BBC Micro and Acorn software. Naturally, Superior Interactive's main focus is on the development of software and utilities for the PC (see the Superior Interactive column (right) for more information). In total, Superior Software has published over one hundred games, including classics such as *Citadel*, *Galaforce* and *Exile* (many consider the latter to be the greatest BBC Micro game of all time). Then of course, there was the unforgettable *Repton* series of titles which remain firm favourites with gamers even today.

So, whilst the market may have changed radically since Superior's creation back in the summer of 1982, it's still around in the 21st Century – something that can't be said of many British publishers from the old days.

If you want to know more about Superior Software, the BBC Micro and the Acorn Electron, then check out www.stairway tohell.com (which is excellent) or the equally impressive www.beebgames.com. There are plenty of other quality Beeb sites out there and most link to each other.

The Life Of Repton **saw players controlling our hero as he made his way through, erm, life. Look, there's Repton as a cute little toddler. Bless.**









Q & A WITH RICHARD HANSOM (CO-FOUNDER OF SUPERIOR SOFTWARE)

Q: WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE ACORN SYSTEMS AS YOUR MAIN DEVELOPMENT PLATFORMS, RATHER THAN THE MORE POPULAR SPECTRUM OR C64?

A: I began by developing software for the Acorn Atom, the forerunner of the BBC Micro, so it was a natural progression to move onto the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron when they came onto the market, and the company's expertise was built up in terms of the Acorn computers.

Sometimes it can make sense to diversify, sometimes it is better to focus on the main area of strength, and diversification is often a very difficult decision in all kinds of businesses. The BBC Micro's features – such as the easy-to-use assembler – made it appeal to many people, but unfortunately it never really made any impression in the important US marketplace.

Q: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SUPERIOR TITLE AND WHY DO YOU CONSIDER IT TO BE THE BEST?

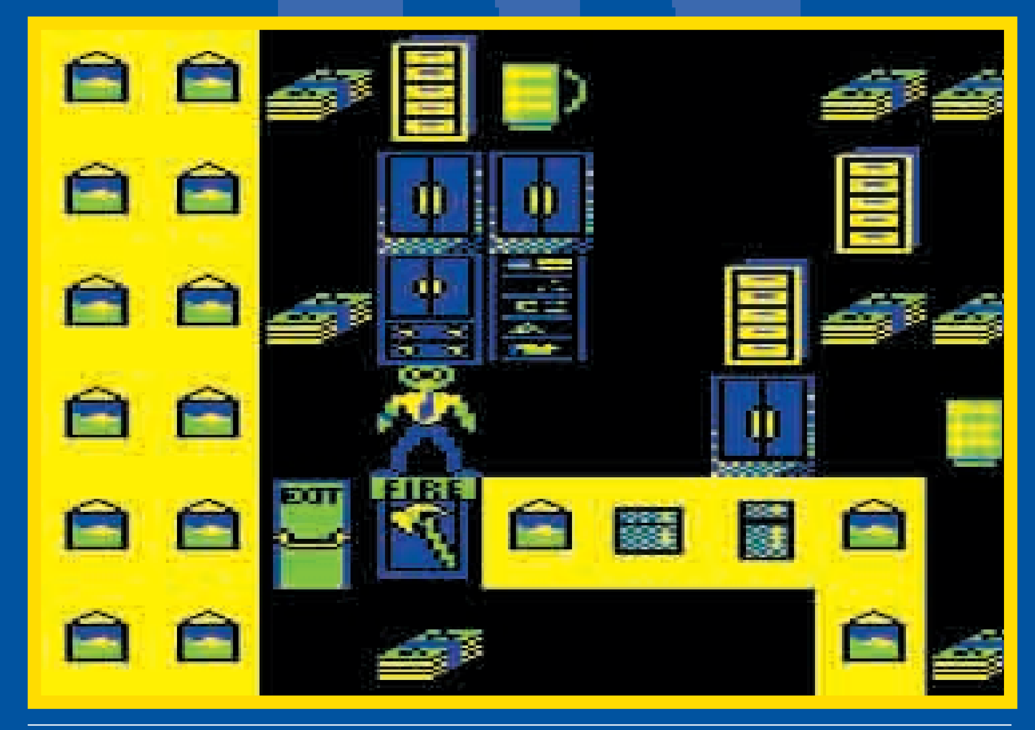
A: Personally, the *Repton* games are my clear favourites. I enjoy all of the *Repton* games, but *Repton 3* would be my first choice. I like the fact that some of the puzzles require a considerable amount of thought. Each *Repton 3* level is like a new adventure – when you see a level for the first time it can seem to be a complex unfamiliar place. Gradually you start to devise a logical route for completing the level, but some of the complex levels can take many attempts until everything slots into place.

Repton is not just a personal favourite of mine, I keep receiving comments from customers saying how much they like the *Repton* games. Several customers have described *Repton* as the best game of all time, and earlier this week a customer emailed me this comment: "*Repton* must be the best game ever on any platform". These kinds of comments are very encouraging and rewarding for us.

Q: SINCE THE 8-BIT ERA IT SEEMS THAT GAMING HARDWARE HAS PROGRESSED MUCH FASTER THAN GAME DESIGN. DO YOU AGREE?

A: In the early days of computer games each new genre of game was an exciting development and at one point it seemed as if the game designers could continue to endlessly devise major new game ideas. There are still new ideas emerging now, but in my opinion the breakthroughs in game design are becoming more rare.

More time and effort is often put into games design



This screen is taken from *The Life Of Repton*. His office bears an uncanny resemblance to those of the games™ team (apart from the lizard, obviously).

now, and there are some very talented game designers out there, but perhaps it is just becoming more and more difficult to come up with really new and revolutionary ideas.

Q: GAMES REALLY DID SEEM BETTER IN THE OLD DAYS – ARE WE NOSTALGIC OLD FOOLS OR DO WE HAVE A POINT?

A: Well, what makes a great game? There is a tendency in today's commercial world to think that it is necessarily better to have more: more graphics, more speed, larger playing areas and so on. However, I think the single most important aspect is the gameplay itself: what is the objective of the game? How is the objective accomplished? Is the process interesting and fun?

I see many games today that have extensive graphics and vast soundtracks, but the gameplay itself is lacking; some games look absolutely superb, but are discarded after literally ten minutes because the game itself is boring or unappealing. Having said that, there are certainly some very good recent games to be found when you shun the games that are superficial and lightweight in terms of their gameplay.

Q: WHICH GAMES HAVE IMPRESSED YOU OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS AND WHY?

A: One of the programmers who worked for Superior, Martin Edmondson, has produced some superb PlayStation games: *Driver*, *Driver 2* and *Stuntman*. I have always been impressed with Martin's work and I enjoy car games, so those games have particularly grabbed my interest. Some (but not all) of the *Sim* games and some new puzzle-style games have made a good impression.

Q: IS THERE ANY CHANCE OF SEEING A SUCCESSOR TO* EXILE, CITADEL *OR ANY OF THE OTHER CLASSIC SUPERIOR TITLES?

A: Yes, we are considering all of the Superior games in terms of PC conversions and new versions. I would like the *Repton* games to be the first releases because so many people have mentioned them as being their favourite games and they will set the stage for the other games, with a PC conversion of *Galaforce* probably being the next release. With regard to successors to games like *Exile* and *Citadel*, it is a possibility for the future.

Q: WAS THE INDUSTRY A BETTER PLACE BACK IN THE OLD DAYS?

A: I think the industry is still an exciting, innovative industry, but perhaps there was even more excitement in the early days because everything was new and sometimes even revolutionary.

Q: HAS THE CREATIVE SPARK GONE OUT OF GAMING?

A: I think some of the initial excitement of gaming has understandably waned a little, but there is still a tremendous amount of impressive creativity around. I'm optimistic that we will see some major game innovations in the next few years, possibly helped by the continued growth in the speed and scope of Internet access.

Q: DO YOU STILL PLAY THE OLD SUPERIOR GAMES?

A: Yes, but nowadays I tend to play them in their new PC versions. These are prototype versions at this stage, but I have been playing *Repton 1*, *2* and *3* and the PC version of *Galaforce* (which is provisionally called *Galaforce Worlds*) over recent weeks.

Q: IF YOU WERE TO BE STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND, WHICH ONE VIDEOGAME SYSTEM WOULD YOU WANT WITH YOU?

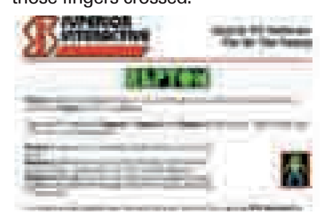
A: Although it's not exclusively a game system of course, I would have to say a PC. The fact that a PC is not just a game system is one of the prime reasons I would choose a PC. Of course, it would be nice to spend some of my time playing PC games but I would also use the time for some programming, which can sometimes be as enjoyable and interesting as the games.

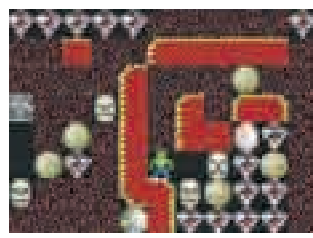
Q: AND WHICH GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE WITH YOU?

A: The *Repton* games, but it would definitely be very important to have the level designers too.



Fans of the *Repton* games will be pleased to hear that the loveable reptile will soon be appearing on a PC near you, courtesy of Superior Interactive. Even as you read this work continues on the PC ports of *Repton 1*, *Repton 2* and *Repton 3*, and each of these updates will feature a number of enhancements over the BBC originals. *Repton 1* will contain a level editor (this is a first) and four new levels to complement those of the original. *Repton 2* will also feature a level editor (this is another first) and contain a selection of brand new interlinked environments. Finally, *Repton 3* will feature 16 brand new levels (making a total of 160), plus reworked graphics and level editors. If that's not enough *Repton* action then Masabi is working on versions of the game for mobile phones, pocket/palm PCs and even a Game Boy Advance instalment. For more information about the new *Repton* games head to www.superiorinteractive.com where you can sign up for the PC *Repton* newsletter and gain yourself a no obligation 10 per cent discount on the games when they arrive. The exciting thing is that if the updates prove popular we could well see conversions of old favourites such as *Citadel*, *Galaforce* and *Exile*. Keep those fingers crossed.



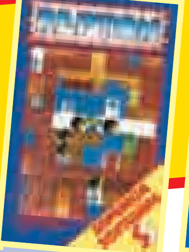
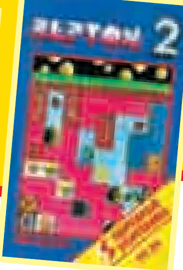


The Superior Interactive website (top) lets you register for an SI newsletter and get 10 per cent off the PC *Repton* games when they're released. Better than a poke in the eye, isn't it?



THE GAMES

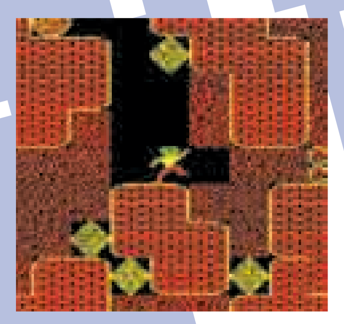


DURING THE HEYDAY OF THE BBC MICRO AND ACORN ELECTRON, SUPERIOR SOFTWARE PUBLISHED AND DEVELOPED AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF SOFTWARE. MANY OF THE EARLIER RELEASES WERE QUITE SIMPLISTIC AFFAIRS (OFTEN CLONES OF POPULAR COIN-OPS), BUT AS THE FIRM GREW, SO TOO DID THE QUALITY OF ITS OUTPUT. TO EXAMINE EVERY GAME RELEASED BY THE PUBLISHER WOULD FILL THE 180 PAGES THAT MAKE UP THIS FINE ORGAN. INSTEAD WE'VE SELECTED A SAMPLE OF THE FIRM'S BEST OFFERINGS.

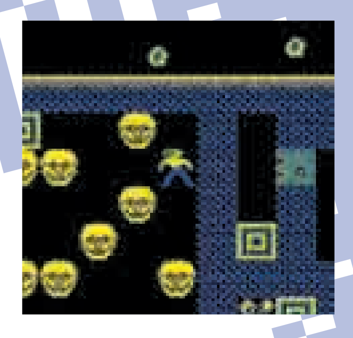
REPTON

It's sometimes described as a *Boulderdash* clone, but the original *Repton* was much more fun (in our opinion). Controlling the eponymous reptile of the title, it was the player's job to clear a series of underground mazes of diamonds. Unfortunately, it wasn't as simple as that – various items scattered around the stages made your job trickier. For example, moving earth from around rocks caused them to fall, sometimes crushing you beneath them or blocking off an area of the level. Some great level design and fiendishly tricky puzzles ensure that this remains playable today.



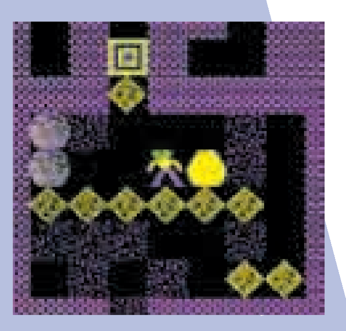
REPTON 2

This new Repton game, while very similar to the original, introduced a number of gameplay changes. Most notably, all the action took place within the confines of one sprawling stage, with each area being linked via a series of transporters. Other new features included skulls that could kill you, strange bug-like spirits and scattered pieces of a puzzle, all of which had to be collected in order to finish the game (fact fans: the completed puzzle spelt "REPTON 2 IS ENDED"). Many gamers (and even creator Tim Tyler) felt this title was a little unforgiving but it's still a fine game when all's said and done.

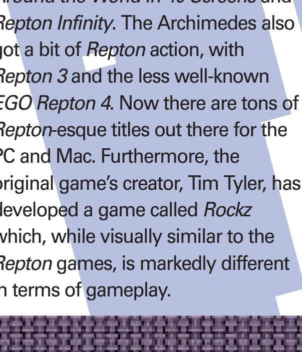


REPTON 3

This was the first *Repton* game not to be programmed by Tim Tyler (Matthew Atkinson did it this time round) – although he did help with some of the level designs. *Repton 3* had more in common with the original game (with its separate levels), although it retained a number of ideas from the second instalment. Perhaps the biggest innovations here were the level and graphics editors. This allowed players to design their own mazes and tinker about with the game sprites. Many *Repton* fans consider this the best *Repton* game (but there's strong competition from the first instalment).



MORE REPTON

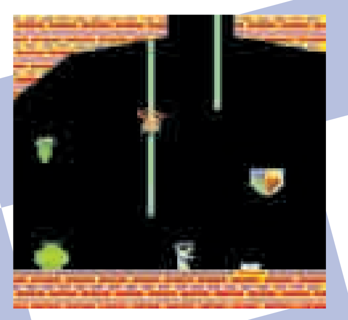


A number of official *Repton* titles (and plenty of unofficial clones) followed *Repton 3*, including *Repton Thru Time, The Life Of Repton, Around the World In 40 Screens* and *Repton Infinity*. The Archimedes also got a bit of *Repton* action, with *Repton 3* and the less well-known *EGO Repton 4*. Now there are tons of *Repton*-esque titles out there for the PC and Mac. Furthermore, the original game's creator, Tim Tyler, has developed a game called *Rockz* which, while visually similar to the *Repton* games, is markedly different in terms of gameplay.



CITADEL

In our opinion this is one of Superior's finest releases and also one of the best platform/adventure games ever released. Controlling a small adventuring wizard, your task was to explore a citadel which was being used as a base by an evil alien dictator, Marduk. The only way to foil Marduk's plan to invade Earth was to collect five crystals and ultimately a strange figurine which would allow you to destroy Marduk's teleport and save the planet. Cute graphics, nicely understated sound effects and some extremely cunning puzzles made this a compulsive title.





GALAFORCE

Superior produced two first-class BBC Micro space shoot-em-ups: *Galaforce* and the more complex sequel, *Galaforce 2*. Both featured many varied alien formations and are well-liked due to having some of the best game music ever heard on a BBC Micro – it really stretched the machine's capabilities. Both *Galaforce* games were written by Kevin Edwards, who is renowned not just for his game writing capabilities (he programmed Superior's *Crazee Rider* too), but also for being an expert in fiendishly clever disk-protection systems.



EXILE

Exile defied belief in the way in which (cliché alert) it convinced the player that they were really roaming around a living, breathing alien world. Controlling the central protagonist (a member of a stranded exploration party), you explored an increasingly hostile, alien-filled set of environments. The game's physics meant that every object you encountered adhered to the laws of gravity with exceptional realism – small objects could be lobbed around with ease, whilst other items would hardly budge. Sadly, the declining BBC Micro market meant *Exile* wasn't experienced by nearly as many gamers as it should have been. A number of decent conversions also failed to make a major impression. Most overlooked game ever…?



STRYKER'S RUN

The BBC and Electron weren't particularly famed for side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups, but this somewhat sluggish action title impressed many at the time of its launch. Starting out on foot you controlled a soldier as he made his way through an enemy-packed landscape, blasting enemy troops and avoiding the odd obstacle such as landmines. One of the game's more novel features was the way that you could take control of a number of flying vehicles and continue the battle in the sky. The game is in a much lower league than true Superior classics such as *Citadel* and *Exile*.



Q & A WITH TIM TYLER (CREATOR OF REPTON 1& 2)

Q: WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE MERRY WORLD OF VIDEOGAME DEVELOPMENT?

A: I had had fun as a teenager playing computer games. Games programming seemed like the most interesting thing that could be done with a computer and there seemed to be some chance of making a few bucks in the process.

Q: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE GAMES YOU WORKED ON BEFORE YOU CODED* REPTON*?

A: There was *Moon Cycle*, *Cosmic Debris* and *Pink*. The first was published by SS under the title *BMX On The Moon* – a title which I loathed. The second two never saw the light of day. All were sideways scrolling games – I had mastered scrolling using the VIDC chip – and perhaps I was something of a one trick pony on that front. It did seem to make sense to try for a larger playing area that would fit on the screen. *Pink* was a platform game featuring a pink panther in an underground cave system who had to collect diamonds. A foreshadow of *Repton*, perhaps.

Q: WHY WAS REPTON A REPTILY LIZARD THING AND DID YOU CONSIDER ANY OTHER DESIGNS FOR THE CENTRAL CHARACTER?

A: That just sort of happened. The BBC had a limited palette with not very many flesh tones. I was further confined to only four colours because of the screen mode I wanted to work in. The choice for the skin was between yellow and green. Green looked better so the main character turned into a reptile, and the rest of the reptilian imagery grew out of that.

Q: WHEN ASKED TO NAME THEIR FAVOURITE REPTON GAME MOST PEOPLE GO FOR THE ORIGINAL TITLE OR* REPTON 3*, WHICH IS YOUR PERSONAL FAVOURITE?

A: Probably one of mine – maybe the first. The second had improvements – but also some idiosyncrasies.

Q: DID YOU EVER REACH A POINT WHEN YOU COULD HAVE TAKEN OUT A CONTRACT ON REPTON'S LIFE?

A: I do remember wishing that Superior Software would kill *Repton* off. I believe I even drew some sketches of a game involving killing huge numbers of innocent-looking lizards (with large eyes) at one point.

Q: SUPERIOR SOFTWARE WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR PUBLISHING FIRMS DURING THE HEYDAY OF THE BBC MICRO. WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING THERE?

A: I worked from home, I never visited their premises.

Q: WHICH GAMES PAST OR PRESENT DO YOU ADMIRE AND WHY?

A: Ancient: Orlando's BBC games because I enjoyed playing them so much. Modern: *The Many Faces Of Go* (www.smart-games.com/manyfaces.html) because I can appreciate what it takes to program such things.

Q: SINCE THE DAYS WHEN THE ORIGINAL REPTON APPEARED, DO YOU THINK THAT MONEY-MEN HAVE DRIVEN THE CREATIVITY OUT OF GAME DESIGN AND THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY?

A: I am not very involved with the modern games industry and don't have much insight into it. I'm happy that mobile phones are causing a resurgence of interest in a number of older 2D games – including *Repton*.



Tim Tyler in 2002. Father of *Repton* and therefore a legend.

Here's Tim back in 2001. What a difference a year makes…

Q: IN YOUR OPINION WERE THE EARLIER VIDEOGAMES MORE CREATIVE THAN TODAYS?

A: I can't say. I do have some nostalgia for the days when it was still possible for single individuals to produce games.

Q: HAVE YOU HAD MUCH TO DO WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE* REPTON *UPDATES?

A: Very, very little. I thought a bit of an update was indicated by the intervening technological progress – and my own modern 'rock and diamond' game (which can be found at www.rockz.co.uk) is a reworking from scratch, which makes little attempt to copy from the original.

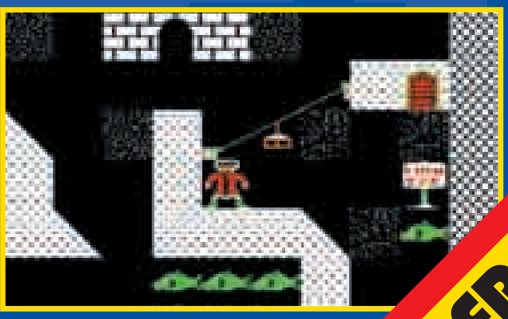
Q: WHAT ARE YOU UP TO THESE DAYS?

A: I'm still writing computer programs. Java and C++ these days, though.

Q: FINALLY, IN NO MORE THAN FIVE WORDS CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT CELLULAR AUTOMATA IS ALL ABOUT?

A: See www.cell-auto.com and www.cafaq.com





Tyler didn't work on the later versions of *Repton* (pictured), but the high quality of the earlier games was retained in the final few instalments of the series, such as *Around The World In 40 Screens*.

Retro

COIN-OP DRIVING GAMES FAMILY TREE

Gamers' obsessions with driving simulations can be traced back to the 1940s, when mechanical games such as Drive Mobile (manufactured by International Mutoscope Company) appeared in amusement halls. These machines eventually evolved into what became known as electromagnetic games – these offered a more advanced (but still, by today's standards, archaic) driving experience. By the mid-Seventies, coin-operated games in arcades were evolving yet again and soon the advance of videogame technology heralded a new era of arcade driving titles. We trace the history of this massively popular genre.

GRAN TRAK 10



- 1974
- Atari
- A simplistic affair viewed from an overhead perspective (like most of the early racing titles), your objective was simply to drive round a single screen track accumulating points for distance covered. Now the race was on…

NIGHT DRIVER

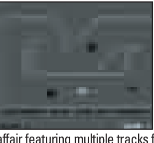
- 1976
- Atari
- The first quasi-3D driving game was developed by Atari. Using white lines to depict the roadside, the premise that you were driving at night was used to disguise the lack of detail on the road. A seminal title that paved the way for games like *Out Run*.

SPEED FREAK



- 1979
- Vectorbeam
- This game was light years ahead of its time. The road, traffic and trackside objects were displayed using vector graphics, giving the title a highly realistic feel. This level of realism would not be seen again in coin-op form until Atari's *Hard Drivin'* in 1989.

SPRINT 2

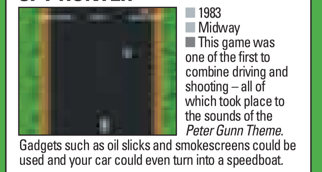


- 1976
- Kee Games
- One of many clones inspired by *Gran Trak 10*, *Sprint 2* (the '2' representing the number of players) was another simplistic overhead affair featuring multiple tracks for two players. *Sprint* later appeared in one, four and eight-player versions.

POLE POSITION

- 1982
- Namco/Atari
- *Pole Position's* colourful visuals and fast gameplay changed peoples' expectations of how driving games should look and play. Time hasn't been kind to *Pole Position*, but the game's importance within the genre cannot be overstated.

SPY HUNTER



- 1983
- Midway
- This game was one of the first to combine driving and shooting – all of which took place to the sounds of the *Peter Gunn Theme*. Gadgets such as oil slicks and smokescreens could be used and your car could even turn into a speedboat.

TX-1

- 1983
- Tatsumi
- This lesser-spotted machine was like *Pole Position* on steroids. It's best remembered for its enormous three-screen cabinet – the main action was displayed on the centre screen while the left and right monitors provided a panoramic view.

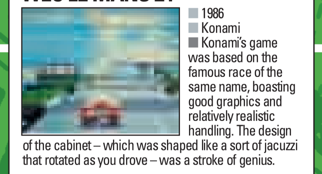
BUGGY BOY (SPEED BUGGY)

- 1986
- Tatsumi
- This quirky racer came in standard and deluxe (three-screen) formats. Your task was to drive a buggy around a series of cartoonish landscapes, all filled with various obstacles. You could flip your vehicle about and even drive on two wheels.

OUT RUN

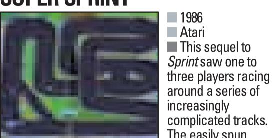
- 1986
- SEGA
- With its astonishing sprite-scaling visuals, great car handling and a selectable soundtrack *Out Run* set new standards in the driving genre. The ability to choose your route was also novel and *Out Run* still looks and plays like a dream.

WEC LE MANS 24



- 1986
- Konami
- Konami's game was based on the famous race of the same name, boasting good graphics and relatively realistic handling. The design of the cabinet – which was shaped like a sort of jacuzzi that rotated as you drove – was a stroke of genius.

SUPER SPRINT



- 1986
- Atari
- This sequel to *Sprint* saw one to three players racing around a series of increasingly complicated tracks. The easily spun wheels of the cabinet suited the action perfectly and collecting spanners let you improve your car's specs.

FINAL LAP

- 1987
- Namco
- *Final Lap* is best remembered for being the first multi-cabinet multiplayer coin-op racing game. Four sets of twin cabinets could be linked, allowing a total of eight players to indulge in the game's Formula 1-based action.

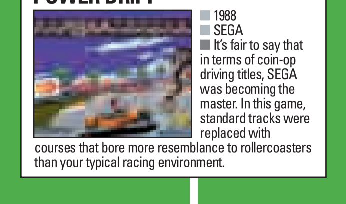
ROAD BLASTERS

- 1987
- Atari
- *Road Blasters* allowed stressed-out players to blow away other drivers. The graphics were basic and the handling was far from realistic, but this was an enjoyable title. A friendly plane-type thing that dropped off extra weaponry spiced things up.

CHASE H.Q.

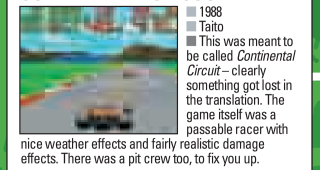
- 1988
- Taito
- With *Chase H.Q.*, Taito refined the mission-based driving game genre. An assortment of ne'er-do-wells had to be apprehended before they crossed the border – this basically involved ramming their vehicles with your Porsche-like car.

POWER DRIFT



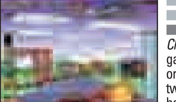
- 1988
- SEGA
- It's fair to say that in terms of coin-op driving titles, SEGA was becoming the master. In this game, standard tracks were replaced with courses that bore more resemblance to rollercoasters than your typical racing environment.

CONTINENTAL CIRCUS



- 1988
- Taito
- This was meant to be called *Continental Circuit* – clearly something got lost in the translation. The game itself was a passable racer with nice weather effects and fairly realistic damage effects. There was a pit crew too, to fix you up.

SPECIAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

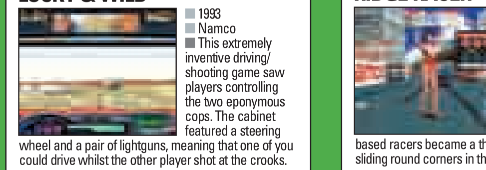


■ 1989
■ Taito
■ The sequel to *Chase H.Q.* took the gameplay of the original and added a twist – you could hang out of the car and shoot at the enemy. Visually, the game was superior to *Chase H.Q.* and the shooting element needed plenty of skill.

CISCO HEAT

■ 1990
■ Jaleco
■ In theory this was an interesting release which saw you hurtling through the streets of San Francisco. Different routes could be taken as you competed against your rivals. Sadly, it was let down by glitchy graphics.

LUCKY & WILD

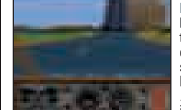


■ 1993
■ Namco
■ This extremely inventive driving/shooting game saw players controlling the two eponymous cops. The cabinet featured a steering wheel and a pair of lightguns, meaning that one of you could drive whilst the other player shot at the crooks.

CRAZY TAXI

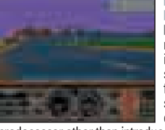
■ 1999
■ SEGA
■ Assuming the role of a taxi driver, your task was to speed around the streets and pick up fares. If you made too many slip-ups on the way to your destination the disgruntled passenger would get out without paying. Bugger.

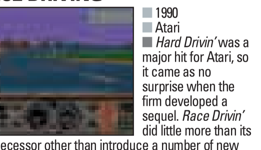
HARD DRIVIN'



■ 1989
■ Atari
■ This was touted as the most realistic driving simulation yet seen in an arcade. For its time, *Hard Drivin'* was an impressive title. The mixture of realism and the game's memorable loop section made for a unique driving experience.

RACE DRIVING



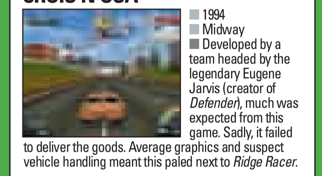


■ 1990
■ Atari
■ *Hard Drivin'* was a major hit for Atari, so it came as no surprise when the firm developed a sequel. *Race Drivin'* did little more than its predecessor other than introduce a number of new cars and circuits – hardly revolutionary, but good fun.

RIDGE RACER

■ 1993
■ Namco
■ When Namco's superb *Ridge Racer* appeared, gamers were blown away. Indeed, following the release of this highly playable title, sprite-based racers became a thing of the past. Power sliding round corners in the deluxe cabinets was a joy.

CRUIS'N USA



■ 1994
■ Midway
■ Developed by a team headed by the legendary Eugene Jarvis (creator of *Defender*), much was expected from this game. Sadly, it failed to deliver the goods. Average graphics and suspect vehicle handling meant this paled next to *Ridge Racer*.

CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER

■ 2003
■ SEGA
■ Oh, how times change – the finest driving games used to appear in arcades first and on home systems later. Not these days. But the good news is that SEGA plans to bring its Xbox version of *Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller* to arcades this year.

TURBO OUT RUN

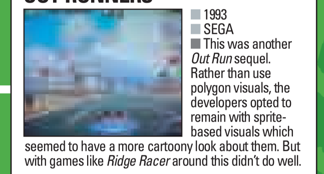
■ 1989
■ SEGA
■ This lame *Out Run* sequel had the same concept as the first game, although this time you had a turbo option that made your car overheat if you overused it. Perhaps the game's worst problems were its lacklustre visuals and uninspiring gameplay.

RAD MOBILE

■ 1991
■ SEGA
■ Arguably one of SEGA's most accomplished sprite-based racers: forked paths, police chases and snazzy weather effects helped bring the action to life. This was one of SEGA's first titles to use the System 32 board set and it looked great.

OUT RUNNERS





■ 1993
■ SEGA
■ This was another *Out Run* sequel. Rather than use polygon visuals, the developers opted to remain with sprite-based visuals which seemed to have a more cartoony look about them. But with games like *Ridge Racer* around this didn't do well.

DAYTONA USA

■ 1994
■ SEGA
■ Stunning visuals were backed up by impossibly addictive gameplay in SEGA's classic. The feedback from the wheel meant your car handled like a dream but the real fun was to be had with eight players competing against one another.

DAYTONA USA 2: BATTLE ON THE EDGE

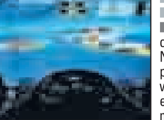


■ 1998
■ SEGA
■ You can't improve on perfection but SEGA had a good try with this sequel to the stunning *Daytona USA*. Somehow it wasn't as addictive as the original. That said, we still pumped a fair old bit of cash into the beast.

OUT RUN (PROVISIONAL TITLE)

■ 2003
■ SEGA
■ SEGA is currently developing a next-gen update of *Out Run*. It hasn't revealed details of how the new game will look and play – but SEGA has confirmed that the game will run on the Xbox-based Chihiro board, so this could be rather good.

WINNING RUN



■ 1988
■ Namco
■ After the success of Atari's *Hard Drivin'*, Namco released this polygon GP game. It was enjoyable enough, but it failed to make a major impact on the gaming scene. Also, the limited nature of console technology meant it never made it into homes.

DRIVER'S EYES

■ 1990
■ Namco
■ Strikingly similar to Namco's early *Winning Run*. *Driver's Eyes* was a polygon racer, but it benefited from a rather fancy three-screen cabinet. Of course, the cabs were expensive so only larger arcades could afford to get the machine.

VIRTUA RACING

■ 1992
■ SEGA
■ SEGA's polygon racer heralded a new era in terms of coin-op driving games, offering the most realistic racing experience to date. One of its main innovations was the way players could switch between different camera angles mid-game.

FERRARI F355 CHALLENGE

■ 1999
■ SEGA
■ With this three-screen monster, SEGA released a surprisingly realistic coin-op racer. Those used to over-the-top power sliding must have got a serious wake up call when they first played this one…

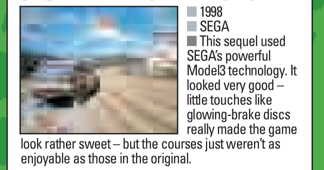
SUPER MONACO GP

■ 1989
■ SEGA
■ When it was released in 1989, this F1 title looked absolutely gorgeous. As the title suggests, your task was to race through the beautifully detailed streets of Monaco. A drastically cut down (in visual terms) MegaDrive conversion followed.

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

■ 1995
■ SEGA
■ Rally games really took off after this title. What made this so special was the vehicle handling, which was absolutely spot on. Indeed, the satisfaction from masterfully holding a drift as you screamed round a mountain pass was immeasurable.

SEGA RALLY 2 CHAMPIONSHIP



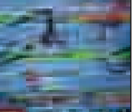
■ 1998
■ SEGA
■ This sequel used SEGA's powerful Model3 technology. It looked very good – little touches like glowing-brake discs really made the game look rather sweet – but the courses just weren't as enjoyable as those in the original.

IRONMAN IVAN STEWART'S SUPER OFF ROAD

■ 1989
■ Leland Corporation
■ A polished off-road racer that saw three players blasting around one-screen overhead tracks in 4 x 4 trucks. It was an unashamed *Super Sprint* clone, but the way the trucks reacted to potholes and pools of water was most impressive.

DANNY SULLIVAN'S INDY HEAT





■ 1991
■ Leland Corporation
■ One of the last overhead driving coin-ops, this is arguably one of the most polished games of its type, with fantastic graphical detail and solid gameplay. The title had elements from *Super-Off Road* and *Super Sprint*.



In between each mission a bonus stage appeared where you had to hurl stars at oncoming ninjas. Hit them all and you received a bonus life.

Here we can see two of Joe's different magic attacks in action. If you made it through the stage without using them a bonus was awarded.

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

S•H•I•N•O•B•I

COUNTLESS SEQUELS HAVE FOLLOWED, BUT THE ORIGINAL COIN-OP VERSION OF SHINOBI IS STILL THE BEST

Format: **Coin-op**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Price: **10/20p Per Play**
Release date: **1987**

Mention *Shinobi* to the majority of gamers and they'll probably start ranting on about *The Revenge of Shinobi* (*Super Shinobi* in Japan). Now, we'll admit that this MegaDrive title wasn't a bad game, but that doesn't change the fact that the original 1987 *Shinobi* coin-op will forever remain the defining moment of the series's history.

SEGA had already cut its teeth in the scrolling-fighter/action genre in the form of the 1985 title *My Hero*. The firm would revisit such territory in 1987 with *Shinobi* – an improved variant of Namco's excellent *Rolling Thunder*. Whereas in the Namco title you controlled a Special Agent, in *Shinobi* you took charge of Joe Musashi – a shuriken-throwing ninja. Your task was to rescue the kidnapped children of your clan, who'd been whisked away by the mysterious Zeed Corporation.

This involved making your way through five heavily guarded – and, we might add, beautifully designed – stages (or missions to be precise), each of which was split into a number of sub-levels, the last of which contained a boss character.

Your primary weapon was your unlimited stock of throwing stars, but at points you could collect a powerful gun and, should the situation necessitate it, it was possible to mix it up with close-quarter attacks. Furthermore, ninja magic (which acted like a smart bomb and came in three different flavours) could be used once per level.

At the time of the game's release, SEGA was most famous for pseudo-3D extravaganzas such as *Space Harrier* and *Out Run* which exploited high-end technology and hydraulic cabinets. It was therefore surprising to see the firm release one of the greatest examples of a side-scrolling action game from seemingly nowhere.

Each stage tested both your memory and your reactions, with the varied enemies you encountered challenging your skills in different ways. Scimitar-throwing musclemen, somersaulting ninjas and Spider-Man wannabes were just a sample of the foes you encountered on your way.

Dual layer locations also added to the challenge, with both Joe and certain enemies being able to leap between the foreground and background. Perhaps *Shinobi*'s greatest strength was that whilst it was tough, it was never unfair. To repeat the videogame journalism cliché: "If you died, you knew it was your own fault".

Indeed, while expert players could clear the game with one credit, *Shinobi* was no pushover and compared to, say, *Double Dragon* (where the notorious elbow move made things a doddle), only the most determined of players ever negotiated their way through the torturous fifth mission and defeated the Masked Ninja.

This was a game that got everything right: stylised graphics and audio, a perfect learning curve and well balanced gameplay – it was all here. Sadly, the title never got a perfect home conversion (the PC Engine version was decent but still sorely lacking). Luckily, *Shinobi* arcade boards are quite easy to come by if you fancy trying the real deal.

MAGIC MOMENTS

During each level Joe could use his special ninja magic to get him out of a tricky situation (but only once, mind). These took three different forms, including an electricity burst, a hurricane-style strike and, best of all, a strange spell where lots of clones sped around the screen taking out any foes in the vicinity.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO? • WHATEVER HAPPENED TO?

THE KONIX MULTI-SYSTEM

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO? • WHATEVER HAPPENED TO?

Was it a car? Was it a plane? Was it a bike? No, no and thrice no. The Konix Multi-System was, in fact, 'vapourware' of the finest variety. This month we get all jingoistic about the greatest British games console that never was…

The history of the videogame industry is littered with stories of well-intentioned projects that ended up falling flat on their faces. One of the most famous of these is the Konix Multi-System – originally codenamed Slipstream and touted as the first "true British" console.

Hype concerning the machine started to grow in 1988 and soon reached fever pitch, due largely to the machine's innovative (yet highly unfeasible) design. After much press speculation concerning the 'dream machine' it never arrived. So, what did happen to the Konix Multi-System? Sit down in your prototype chair peripherals and read on…

The project began life as a PC gaming peripheral designed by Wyn Holloway, who had founded Konix and created the Konix Speedking. Following the success of the Speedking, Holloway set about creating the ultimate peripheral which would allow players – via just one versatile device – to switch between bike handlebars, a steering wheel and cockpit-like set-ups (standard joystick ports were also going to be included). While Konix was finalising the design of this new device, a firm called Flare was finishing off the design and tech specs of the Flare One computer.

BEST OF BRITISH? ERM…

The firms were soon working together to produce what the press at the time told us would be "the £200 arcade machine". So why the comparisons with an arcade machine? Well, in addition to the main console unit, Konix was also working on a 'power chair' that would mimic high-end coin-op cabinets like those used with *Space Harrier* and *Out Run*.

The console itself (which boasted a 4,096 colour palette and a 16-bit processor) was meant to sell for just £199.99. Considering that the chair was pencilled in for £220 and the games (supplied on 3.5-inch disks) were going to sell for £14.99, the Konix Multi-System sounded almost too good to be true. It was.

Despite getting to the prototype stage – the press were shown some software demos and shoddy Amiga ports – the machine (and the chair) never hit the market. Many reasons could be given for the machine's failure to materialise: poor software support, Konix's financial difficulties and the arrival of powerful Japanese consoles such as the MegaDrive.

Sadly, Flare's bad luck was not over – it went on to design the technology that powered Atari's ill-fated Jaguar.

CHAIR TODAY GONE TOMORROW

Prototypes of the much sought after 'power chair' did actually make it to production (working examples are said to exist today). The chair was shown off to the press at the 1989 PCW show, but broke down within a day. The fact that the only games being shown didn't make any use of the device whatsoever also failed to convince the (by now sceptical) industry that the machine and the chair were viable contenders. Still, you can't help but think what could have been…



THE WHEEL DEAL

The Konix Multi-System could be positioned in three different ways, including (01) a steering wheel, (02) bike handlebars and (03) a kind of cockpit set-up.

01



02



03





CLASSIC MAGAZINES

The last of the great Spectrum mags disappeared from shelves in 1993. Almost a decade after its demise, we remember *Your Sinclair*…

YOUR SINCLAIR

Starting life as *Your Spectrum* back in January 1984, the magazine became *Your Sinclair* at the end of 1985. Of the three big Spectrum magazines (the others being *Sinclair User* and *Crash*), *Your Sinclair* (*YS* to its friends) took the most irreverent stance towards the merry world of Spectrum gaming. Make no mistake, each of the 93 issues were packed with interesting features and insightful reviews, but the writers were always able to make a point in a humorous and palatable fashion. Take, for example, this snippet from a review of *Thrust*: "Have you ever been picked up by the fuzz? No, but I've been swung around by the pods". Not the greatest line in the world, but back when we were wearing short trousers we loved *YS*'s anarchic humour. It's a testament to the loyalty of the magazine's readers that it managed to survive until September '93 (well into the heyday of the 16-bit systems). For more info about this fine publication then head to the excellent *Your Sinclair* Rock 'n' Roll Years website at www.ysrnry.co.uk, where you can also read back issues.



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E·S B·U·Y·E·R·S G·U·I·D·E

I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR

Here's a basic list of the more popular games machines that people are collecting. The prices shown are a rough estimate of what you should be paying for a decent condition machine in its original box with little or no software. Obviously, though, prices can vary dramatically.

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
MegaDrive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

SYSTEMS

NEO GEO POCKET



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£40-50 (depending on condition & box)

This was SNK's successor to the earlier Neo Geo Pocket, which was a monochrome system. As the system's name suggests, the new machine featured colour visuals, although it was still capable of running the older black and white software. Technically this was a quality piece of kit, with a good display, decent battery life and a strong line-up of software.

Unsurprisingly, the machine failed to provide a serious challenge to the Game

ATARI LYNX



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£35-40 (the original model costs more)

Developed by a group of engineers who had previously worked on the Amiga, the technology for the Lynx was purchased by Atari from Epyx (a firm better known for titles such as *Impossible Mission* and the *Games* series). The system was technically light years ahead of the Game Gear and particularly the Game Boy. Unfortunately, the size of the machine (the original model was a hefty beast) and its appetite for batteries meant that this wasn't really a machine you could play on the move.

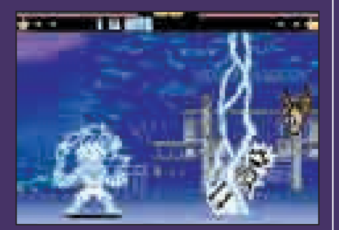
A revised model appeared, which was smaller and featured a switch that allowed players to turn the backlight off (this saved on batteries), but by this point

T COLOR

Boy Color, and when the Game Boy Advance arrived in 2000, SNK's portable wonder looked somewhat anaemic. That didn't stop the system gaining a cult following and the console is already becoming increasingly collectable. The machine came in a number of different colours and tracking one down on eBay or in a second-hand games store shouldn't be too tricky.

SOFTWARE

The Neo Geo Pocket Color played host to a number of quality titles, many of which were based on popular Neo Geo titles such as the *Fatal Fury* and *Metal Slug* games. Like many handhelds there was no territorial lockout between games from different regions, meaning that Japanese and US releases can played with no hassle. Of course, hunting down some of the more obscure Japanese releases will probably require a little extra effort.



The machine was home to several beat-'em-ups, with the mini-stick working well with such titles.

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Metal Slug 1st Mission
- Metal Slug 2nd Mission
- Sonic The Hedgehog Pocket Adventure
- Samurai Shodown! 2
- SNK Vs. Capcom: Match Of The Millennium

WHERE TO LOOK

As the machine isn't that old, it's quite easy to find boxed systems in the second-hand section of many independent stores. Then of course there's trusty eBay, where a quick search found a number of machines for sale for £40-50. The console is getting increasingly popular with collectors, so expect the price to increase soon.

This is *Dinolympics*, which doesn't do a very good job of convincing you to get a Lynx.

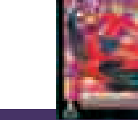
the Game Boy (helped greatly by the impossibly addictive *Tetris*) had already stolen a massive march on the competition. Price cuts followed but the Lynx never really achieved the success it deserved. A dearth of third-party software support didn't help things much either.

If ever you needed proof that a broad range of software sells hardware then just look at the battle between the Lynx and the Game Boy for evidence. Anyway, like many Atari systems, the Lynx has a keen fan-base and is still supported by software coded by loyal enthusiasts.

With machines available for around £35-40 this is well worth investigating. Chunkier original models may cost a bit less.

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Rygar
- S.T.U.N. Runner
- Rampart
- Klax
- Pac-Land



SOFTWARE

The Lynx didn't have the largest or most diverse range of software, but there were a few gems. Conversions of *Rygar*, *A.P.B.* and *Klax* were all extremely accomplished, whilst games such as *Blue Lightning* and *California Games* showed just how advanced the Lynx hardware was for its day. Most Lynx software can be picked up for a fairly pocket-friendly price somewhere between £9.99 and £25 (depending on the title).

WHERE TO LOOK

For starters you could try some of the firms that advertise in the back of this magazine. In addition, you still see the console cropping up in independent stores occasionally. As you might expect, eBay is also worth checking out (is there anything that can't be found there)?

SEGA GAME GEAR



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£35–40 (slightly more if boxed)

Just the like Lynx, the Game Gear did little to cause the Game Boy any major harm. In essence the console was basically a portable version of the Master System. In terms of graphical quality it lay in the middle ground between the Lynx and Game Boy.

Likewise in terms of size it was smaller than Atari's handheld, but more bulky than the Nintendo machine. The console did enjoy a reasonable amount of success and many SEGA fans still swear by the machine, but it crucially lacked the massive range of software that the Game Boy boasted.

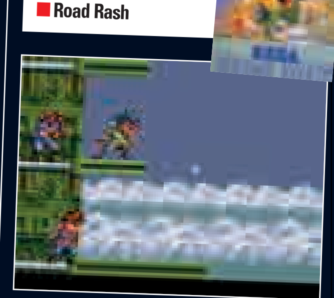
The screen quality was quite good and a number of peripherals including a TV Tuner device were released onto the market. Unfortunately, because many of the games that appeared on the machine had originally been designed for the Master System, a lot of titles proved difficult to see. Fortunately, the machine can be picked up quite cheaply today for about £30 for an unboxed unit and around £45 for a boxed version in good condition.



MegaDrive games such as *Road Rash* ported to the Game Gear surprisingly well.

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Gun Star Heroes
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Virtua Fighter
- Puyo Puyo
- Road Rash



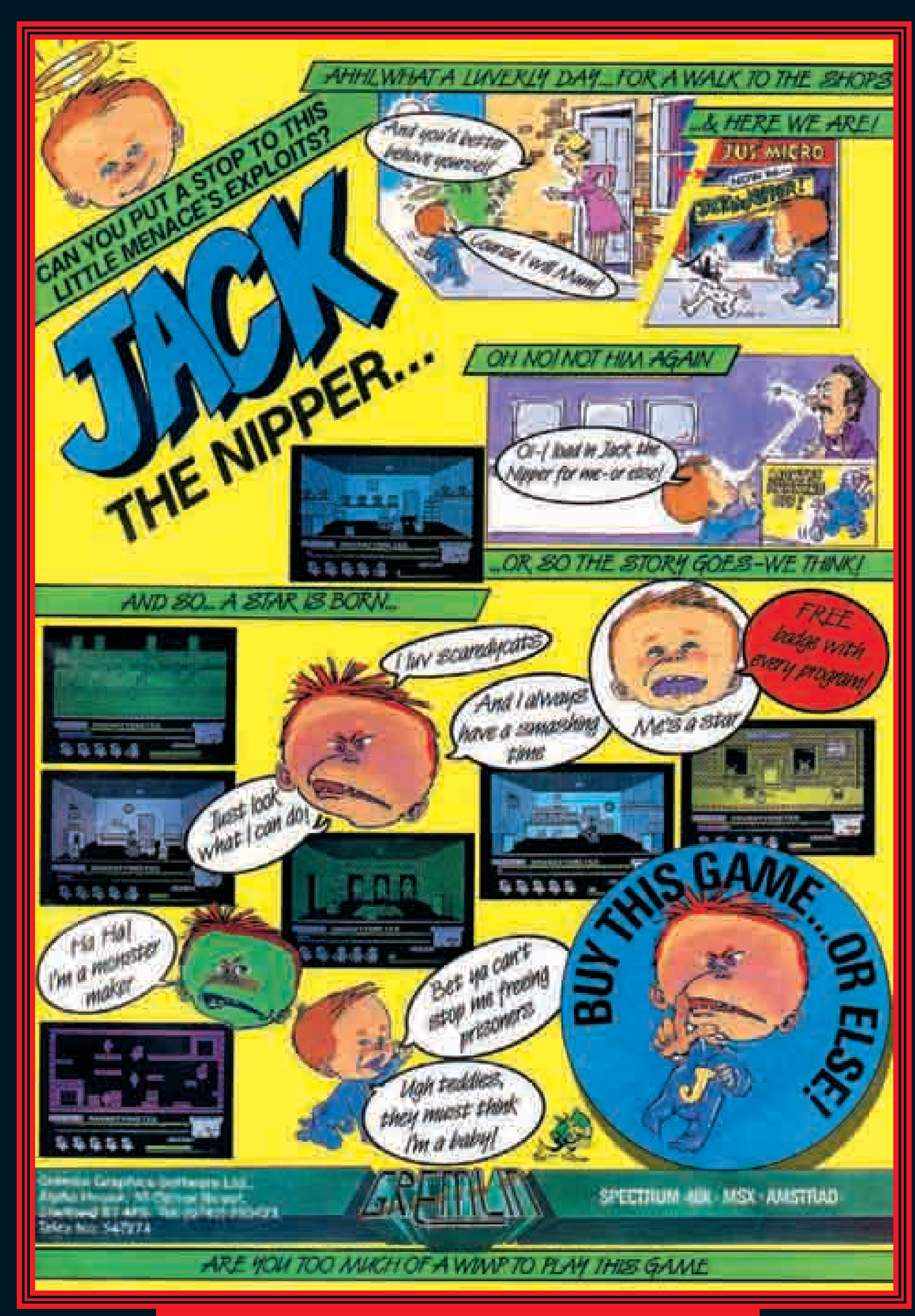
Copies of the Game Gear version of *Gun Star Heroes* are becoming increasingly sought-after by fans of the handheld console.

SOFTWARE

A healthy selection of titles were released for the Game Gear, with pretty much all the major genres being covered. Plenty of SEGA's biggest stars (including Sonic) showed up and good quality third-party support included gems such as *Gun Star Heroes* (a port of Treasure's MegaDrive classic). The good news is that you're not going to have to break the bank to build up a good collection of games, with most going for less than a tenner.

WHERE TO LOOK

Again, the standard Game Gear (and software) still crops up in most decent specialist videogame stores. If you're willing to look about on eBay you can pick up some genuine bargains, with systems complete with games going for around £40. Retro dealers should also be able to help you out in your search for handheld pleasure.



JACK THE NIPPER (Spectrum 48K, MSX, Amstrad) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, July 1986


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

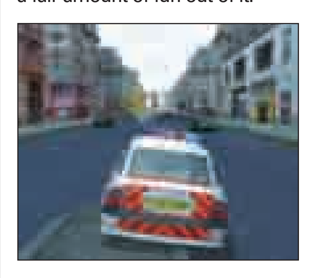
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's headstart over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
10	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft
11	Sky Odyssey	Sony	Cross
12	Final Fantasy X	SCEE	Squaresoft
13	Capcom VS SNK 2	Capcom	In-House
14	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	The Getaway	SCEE	Team Soho
17	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
18	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	In-House
19	Shinobi IMPORT	SEGA	OverWorks
20	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance IMPORT	Konami	In-House

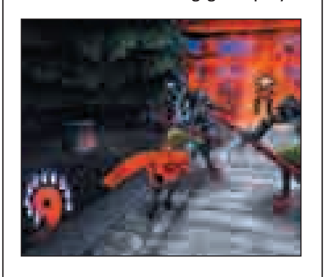
VIEWPOINT
THE GETAWAY
The argument between who got the Christmas Number One might be raging on (was it *GTA: Vice City* or *The Getaway*?) but there's no doubting that Team Soho's effort is quite a good laugh. It's not the best game ever, but you'll still get a fair amount of fun out of it.



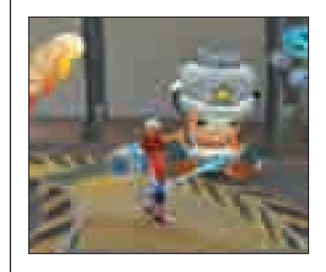
VIEWPOINT
KINGDOM HEARTS
Liked *Final Fantasy*, did you? And *Zelda*? Then you'll definitely love *Kingdom Hearts* – as long as you can get over the fact that it's packed with Disney characters. But that shouldn't put you off picking up what is one of Square's finest offerings for a long time.



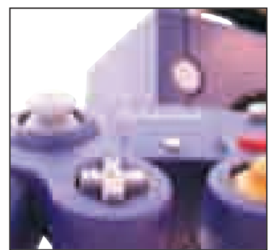
VIEWPOINT
SHINOBI
The trend for bringing old-school franchises bang up to date continues with SEGA's seminal ninja-'em-up. Packed full of familiar references, it still manages to inject some new life into the ageing series with some flashy effects and interesting gameplay.



VIEWPOINT
APE ESCAPE 2
We've said it before and we'll say it again – you've gotta love those monkeys. Considering there are enough platform adventures out on the PS2 to last a lifetime, it's surprising that this one would rank top of the pile. But then we just can't get enough of it…











GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Although it's the cheapest machine on the market, Nintendo's newest console shouldn't be underestimated. The firm's long-established experience in games means that the GameCube can expect to see many quality first- and third-party games in the future. Primarily a games machine, the GameCube has no DVD function.

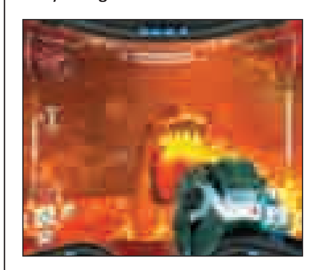




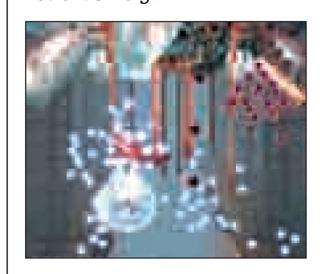
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
2	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
3	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
4	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
5	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
6	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
7	Ikaruga	IMPORT	Treasure	In-House
8	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
9	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
10	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
11	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
12	StarFox Adventures		Nintendo	Rare
13	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
14	Bomberman Generation		Majesco	Hudson
15	SEGA Soccer Slam		SEGA	Black Box
16	Beach Spikers		SEGA	AM2
17	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis
18	Doshin The Giant		Nintendo	In-House
19	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance		Midway	In-House
20	Pikmin		Nintendo	In-House

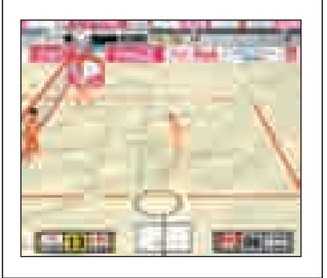
VIEWPOINT
METROID PRIME
The best game on the GameCube so far? Most definitely – although we've got a horrible feeling *Zelda* might be better. Still, considering they're two different games there's more than enough room at the top of the tree for both of them. Why not get both?



VIEWPOINT
IKARUGA
If you're one of those people who thinks 2D shoot-'em-ups are strictly for retro fans, you might want to give *Ikaruga* a go – it'll certainly open your eyes a bit. We haven't seen such frantic (and fun) blasting action since the days of *Radiant Silvergun*...



VIEWPOINT
BEACH SPIKERS
Mmm, ladies. Admittedly, they're not real (although we have experienced real-life women's volleyball close up, so we know what we're talking about), but this is probably as close to the real sport as you can get without all that sand. Or a court order.



VIEWPOINT
MARIO PARTY 4
Yes, you can play it on your own, but if that's all you do you're missing out on the whole experience. Most definitely a game to be enjoyed with friends, *Mario Party 4* is certainly the best game in the series yet. If you like your multiplayer games, get this.



ESSENTIALS

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XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£159.99

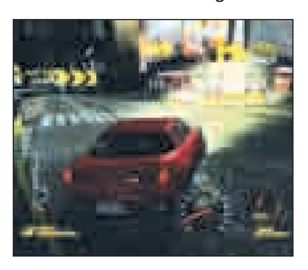
Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Halo		Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	IMPORT	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future		SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell		Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Colin McRae Rally 3		CodeMasters	In-House
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
8	Project Gotham Racing		Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
9	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis
10	Dead Or Alive 3		Microsoft	Tecmo
11	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin		Eidos	Io Interactive
12	Quantum Redshift		Microsoft	Curly Monsters
13	Lamborghini		Rage	In-House
14	Buffy The Vampire Slayer		EA	In-House
15	Phantom Crash		Phantagram	In-House
16	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance		Midway	In-House
17	World Racing		TDK Mediactive	Synetic
18	Blinx: The Time Sweeper		Microsoft	Artoon
19	Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2		Activision	HotGen Studios
20	Toejam & Earl III: Mission To Earth	IMPORT	SEGA	TJ&E Productions

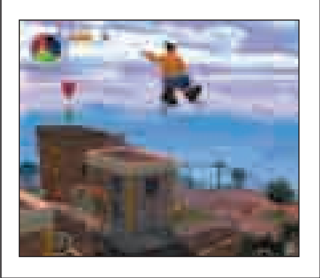
VIEWPOINT
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING
It might have come out nearly a year ago, but *Project Gotham Racing* is still managing to pull us back in for one more lap even now. With stacks of tracks and cars to unlock, picking this up from the second-hand bin is a bargain.



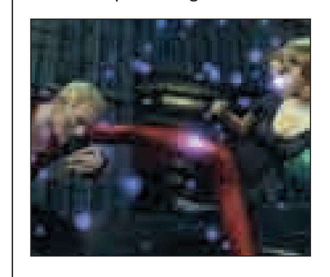
VIEWPOINT
PHANTOM CRASH
Mech games are a dime a dozen these days, but finding one that manages to encapsulate all the fun of blasting while featuring *Gran Turismo*-style tinkering is quite a surprise. *Phantom Crash* came out of nowhere and surprised us all. If you try it, you'll like it.



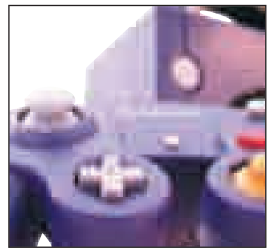
VIEWPOINT
TOEJAM & EARL III
What is it with SEGA bringing back old franchises for one more turn of the wheel? Still, seeing as most of SEGA's older titles were so good, we're hardly going to complain. *TJ&EIII* captures the feel of the originals, while injecting some much-needed freshness.



VIEWPOINT
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER
Surprisingly popular given that it's just a roaming beat-'em-up, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* is one of those games that sinks its teeth into you and doesn't let go (no pun intended, of course). Good clean vampire-killing fun all round.











GBA

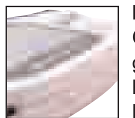
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. No mean feat for such a small machine.

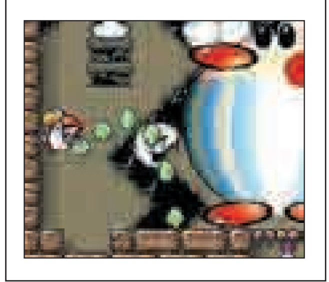
TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
2	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
3	Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance	Konami	In-House
4	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
5	Golden Sun	Nintendo	Camelot
6	Advance Wars	Nintendo	In-House
7	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
8	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
9	Pinball Of The Dead	SEGA	WOW Entertainment
10	Sonic Advance	SEGA	Sonic Team

VIEWPOINT
STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3
Blimey… Dreamcast-quality fighting on a GBA? We'll have a bit of that – *Street Fighter* on the move has never looked so good.



VIEWPOINT
SMA3: YOSHI'S ISLAND
It's tougher than the mutt's nuts and absolutely gorgeous to boot. Nintendo's port of Yoshi's first SNES game is a must for those long, lonesome train journeys.



PC

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable

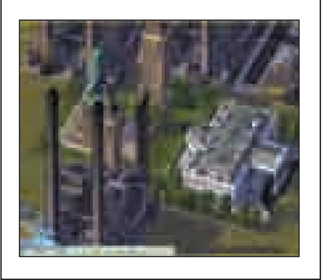


While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
2	Grand Theft Auto 3	Take 2	Rockstar
3	Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Digital Extremes
4	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
5	Sim City 4	EA	Maxis
6	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Counter-Strike	Vivendi	Gearbox Software
9	No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi	Monolith
10	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve

VIEWPOINT
SIM CITY 4
Who'd have thought that putting up buildings and laying roads could be so much fun? Maxis has done it again, and this time it looks as good as it plays.



VIEWPOINT
THE SIMS
You'll never get rid of *The Sims*. EA's people-management classic might turn some people off, but it's dominated more charts than Kylie Minogue's arse ever could.



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

DUAL SHOCK 2

DETAILS

CONSOLE
PlayStation2

FROM
Sony

CURRENT PRICE
£19.99

AVAILABLE
Now

When it comes to pad design, it's pretty fair to say that Sony has taken more than enough inspiration from its competitors to come up with the best layout available. Shoulder buttons, D-pad, analog sticks – all ideas that someone else came up with first and then ended up on Sony's official PlayStation2 pad. Bah. That said, the Dual Shock 2 controller is still the only real choice when it comes to getting a decent PS2 pad. While the third-party alternatives might be cheaper, they'll never be as good as the original. Splashing out the extra cash is worth it in the long run – as long as you're not the kind of person who likes to take out their frustrations on the controller when a game manages to get the better of you, that is.



DVD REMOTE

DETAILS

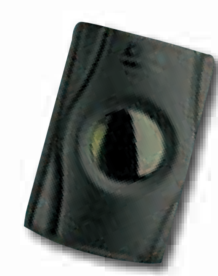
CONSOLE
Xbox

FROM
Microsoft

CURRENT PRICE
£19.99

AVAILABLE
Now

The fact that the Xbox comes with built-in DVD playback functions and yet you can't use them without getting a separate DVD controller is, to be honest, a bit of a pain and a rather obvious way for Microsoft to make a bit of extra cash. But seeing as how the Xbox is definitely the best console DVD player out at the moment (especially when used in conjunction with the Advanced RGB SCART Cable), the DVD remote becomes more of a must-have than an impulse purchase. Of course, it once again falls into the category of 'official is best', which is why we'd suggest getting the proper Microsoft product over any third-party ones that may crop up in the near future – it works a treat and looks the business too.



You'll need to plug this bit into your Xbox to act as a receiver for the remote, but then you already knew that. Right?

MEMORY CARD 251

DETAILS

CONSOLE
Gamecube

FROM
Nintendo

CURRENT PRICE
£24.99

AVAILABLE
Now

Finally, this is the new standard in GameCube memory cards – so why didn't Nintendo bother to release this one in the first place? It's a question that's puzzled us for a while, mainly because the original Memory Card 59 was so small – the more games you played, the more likely it was that you'd have to splash out on an extra card. With the launch of this new 16Mb, 251-block card though, that won't be a problem any more, and seeing as it's an official card rather than a third-party one it won't wipe your saves on you (which, we have to admit, has happened to us with a couple of non-official cards). At £24.99 it's not cheap, but you won't need another one for ages after you buy it. Let's just hope Nintendo hasn't got any even bigger ones up its sleeve, eh?



PS420 DANCE MAT

DETAILS

CONSOLE
PlayStation2

FROM
SCEE

CURRENT PRICE
£19.99

AVAILABLE
Now

If you're in the mood for a spot of *Dancing Stage*-type action on your PS2, finding yourself a decent dance mat can be tough. Not only is the official Konami-branded Dance Mat incredibly hard to find in most high-street shops – and if you manage to get one from somewhere like eBay, it'll cost you quite a bit – but most of the others on the market are pretty shoddily designed and tend to stop working after a while.

Thankfully though, Sony itself has come to the rescue with its own official PS2 mat, having realised just how popular games like *Dancing Stage* are among PS2 owners. It's colourful, durable and no more expensive than other dance mats, even though it's an official Sony product. Just remember that you'll need to buy a game as well before you can actually use it, okay?

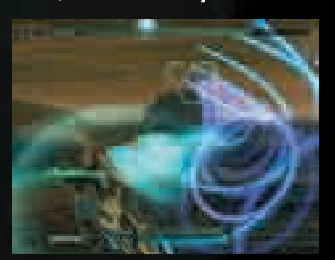

eMag

NEXT MONTH IN gamesTM

Well, we nearly had a breakdown doing it but we've just about got the hang of this four week deadline malarky. That's why we'll be working doubly hard to make issue 4 full of all this meaty goodness…

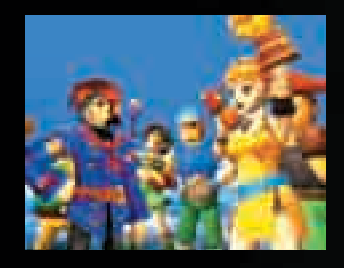
MORE… PREVIEWS

Using all our journalistic powers (and lots of telephone calls), we'll be pestering the people in the know to get updates on the most important games around. Ooh, we can hardly wait.



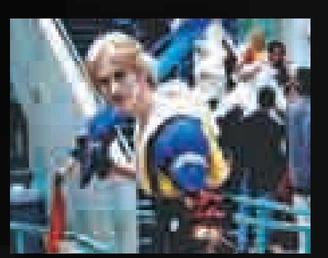
MORE… REVIEWS

All the important releases will be scrutinised by our hard-nosed hacks – among other things, we'll be checking out *Devil May Cry 2, Skies of Arcadia: Legends* and *Championship Manager 4*.



MORE… FEATURES

Art imitates life (or so they say) but what if it's actually the other way round? games™ takes an extensive look at the way that videogames are influencing culture as we know it.



INCLUDING

Come 'ere – there's more…

More… Retro
Back when we were young

More… News
Better than Trevor McDonald

More… Interviews
Important people… and Miyamoto-san. Really. Wow.



So there you have it – despite the fact that it'll take plenty of hard graft, issue 4 of games™ is going to be a scorcher. Honest. In fact, we're willing to lay a substantial amount of money on it, with odds of 2-1 on. Can't say fairer than that, eh?

ON SALE 20 MARCH 03



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Could Bioware's epic Star Wars RPG be the best thing since sliced Jedi? We'll find out in next month's games™

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THIS MONTH'S THOUGHTS ON THE MAGAZINE, ON RETRO GAMING AND (SURPRISE, SURPRISE) NINTENDO…

There are certain things that we're looking for when we select letters to be included in this section. Praising the mag is always nice, but we're not that shallow. We're really looking to coax some debate out of you all, but if you just want to make some insightful comment about videogames, then that's fine by us.

MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™; the traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

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Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here, you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who have bought this issue of **games**™ will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games**™ forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple,so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the Net browser window: www.totalgames.net/forum/
This will give you read-only access to the forum. To get in on the fun, you'll have to register – you can do that by clicking on the 'Register' icon at the top of the page. Fill in your details, choose a name and then wait for a password to be emailed to you (which will arrive in no time).

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, click on the **games**™ forum icon. You'll need the password, and that's '**bunches**'. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **FIRST OF ALL,** I'd just like to say it is refreshing to get a magazine that caters for gamers in their twenties (like me). Also, I like the review style in which the description of the game takes centre stage and the score is placed discretely as a guide. People have their own tastes and so the score is not a general fact (as a lot of magazines seem not to realise).

Due to the more adult nature of the mag, I wanted to make a point that seemed wasted on the 'How do we see Lara naked?' lot. The mass media is quick to claim that computer games are ruining the 'youth of today'. I am a psychologist, and have spent some time studying violence and sex in the media and their effects on behaviour. There is no final answer, but the vast majority of studies show that the link between violent behaviour and playing violent games (or watching violent films) only exists in those children that already have highly psychopathic personalities.

I know that there still should be limits, but it really annoys me how so many people can jump to a misinformed conclusion and then condemn computer games. Surely, the problem isn't the games, but the underlying cause of what makes the few violent kids the way they are. Therefore, why don't arsey parents and journalists stop blaming games and look at their own influences on the kids. The facts show they are far more likely to be the ones to blame

David Hook, via email

games™: It's an issue that vexes us here at **games**™ and one that we'll certainly look into in a future issue of the magazine. At the risk of over-simplifying a pretty volatile issue, we tend to feel that as games are rated according to content (in much the same way that films are), surely it's the parents – who presumably purchase adult games for their kids or, at the very least, fail to monitor the games they allow their kids to play – who should be accountable…

☐ **BEFORE I START** droning on like an old man, may I congratulate you on your first issue. It's nice to find a mag aimed at us 30-somethings rather than just 12-year-olds. I have to admit that my favourite part is the Retro section and being reminded of *Zzap 64* made my morning. I hope you will not only continue this section but also avoid continual sniping at us old fogies who still have fond memories.

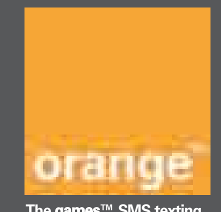
My journey through games has led me down the following path: ZX81, Vic 20, C64, C128, Amiga, Gameboy, CDi (yes, I was the one), PC, PlayStation, Dreamcast, PS2, GBA. I currently have an Athlon XP2000 with a Radeon 8500. And what do I find myself doing more and more? Playing emulators. Don't get me wrong – I'm not one of the deluded people who think *Space Invaders* is better than *GTA3*. But I would rather play *Emlyn Hughes Soccer* on the C64 than *FIFA 2003* because it seems more fun. I would rather play *Football Director* than *Alex Ferguson's Player Manager* for the same reason. But, by the same token, I am a massive *Championship Manager* fan – that stops me playing *Football Director*.

It's the oft-repeated call of us dinosaurs who have been around since the start of games: gameplay is everything. I hired *FIFA 2003* and got fed up after an hour. You may be able to press a multi-combo series of buttons to flick the ball over your head but it doesn't appeal to me. You feel like you're going through the motions. *PES* is realistic and fun. It may not look as good but is

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"THE MASS MEDIA IS QUICK TO CLAIM THAT COMPUTER GAMES ARE RUINING THE 'YOUTH OF TODAY'"

widely accepted as beating *FIFA* hands down. The same applies for old games – a lot were utter pants (although you didn't mind as much if you'd only paid £1.99) but some were, and still are, a great deal of fun to play.

Finally a moan about publishers trying to fleece us retro freaks - £12.99 for *Defender Of The Crown* or *Three Stooges*? Twenty odd quid for *Manic Miner* on the GBA? Are you sure? *Volleyball* on the NES Emulator is currently occupying my time on the GBA. Sad but true.

Dave Bulwer, via email

games™: This is exactly the attitude we have here at **games**™. While we love many of the latest games (heck, there's nothing like seeing where videogames are going) we have more than a passing appreciation of the very best of the retro games. In fact, one of our number (Simon Cann) would gladly never touch a new game again, which is why he's our Retro Editor. Though it's tempting to be bowled over by the technological advances, all games, whether new or old, are supposed to entertain. Whether it's *FIFA*, *Emlyn* or *GTA: Vice City* shouldn't really matter.

I DON'T THINK it would be true to say that everything I know I learned from *Crash* magazine; school and uni probably had something to do with it. However, there's a certain something that comes from reading way too many magazines about videogames in one's formative teenage years. When you write about the kids too young to remember the significance of the Atari symbol on their retro-styled shirt, you do not describe me, mate, I was that Generation X-er.

Coming to the horrified realisation that I can name the games in 58 of the 80 Spectrum screenshots you printed, I reflected that the more things change, the more they stay the same. No-one misses the dodgy sound and horrible attribute clash, but there were some addictively playable games out there. If anyone wants to put out a 21st Century version of *Jetpac* for the Gamecube, I'm there.

There are no words to describe the frustration at having three goes to load *Elite* from cassette, only to have the Lenslok antipiracy device screw up on you… again. But how are kids these days supposed to fit in their maths homework waiting for the next level of *TimeSplitters 2* to load from optical disc (all of 12 seconds)? And can anyone tell me if it's my aged cynicism that stops my jaw dropping when I see *Starfox Adventures* resplendent in its 33 polygon per second bump-mapped glory, when I could barely breathe on witnessing the monochrome isometric perspective of *Knightlore* in 1984?

Fortunately, we'll always complain about the price of games: £10 for the aforementioned *Knightlore* – how much purchasing consideration went into that one? Another constant: with very few exceptions, film tie-ins are pants and not worth the wait.

Ah, happy memories. I'm delighted you're exploring them through Retro. In fact, scrap the rest of the magazine and just keep printing the Spectrum stuff. I don't care what's new and hot for PS2 – give me painted covers and overlong POKE routines any day.

Chris Lewis, via email

games™: We can't just scrap the coverage of new games in the mag, can we? The whole point is that the mag is supposed to be a celebration of all games whether new or old. That said, most of

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TEXT LIFE...

☐ I was going to text you about something intelligent & worthwhile but could not think of anything (sorry).

We appreciate the thought…

☐ I was going to text you about something intelligent & worthwhile but could not think of anything (sorry).

…and you wonder how Orange manage to stay in business.

☐ Hi, I have subscribed, the only improvement to be made is to stop using words that are blasphemous. It upsets me and sounds vacuous.

Consider us told. (Note to selves: watch out for this in future.)

☐ Do you think that you could tell me when the next issue of **games**™ will be coming out?

Look at the next month page. Jesus…

☐ I wanted to get my grubby mitts on a copy of issue 1 before it got taken off the shelves, but was too late. Any chance of a copy?

Cough up for a back issue, ya cheapskate.

☐ YOUR MAG IS GREAT I JUST FOUND A TOMYTRONIC.

Good for you. You could only play those things when next to a window, just like a GBA.

☐ More retro please. These are fascinating and reminded me of great gaming forgotten!

Rest assured, the Retro section will remain.

☐ I think your retro section is ok but I think it is a bit of a waste of good pages. What I think should be done with this is that you put a few help guides in for some of us really stuck gamers. I am not suggesting you do this with all games but only those real "aah am going mad" games like *Metroid Fusion*. Please reply.

And to think that we had meetings and meetings about this. Unless the vast majority of games™ readers write in and ask us to provide you with guides or master-classes for games, they will not be appearing in this magazine. If you like your games spoiled for you, there are plenty of solution magazines out there. We recommend *Xpert Solutions, PowerStation, CUBE Solutions* or a back issue of *Advance SSS* (for the *Metroid Fusion* solution) if that's your sort of thing.



Better than *FIFA 2003*? For some people, it really is all about the gameplay…

the team well remember the days of games on tape and, if memory serves, most of them seem to believe that we played every single game ever released in that period, which can't possibly be true. Happy days indeed, but let's not forget that over the coming year there's going to be some pretty good games coming out – especially what's possibly the most important development in home gaming ever: broadband. Enjoy the past but be prepared for a very exciting future.

☐ **THERE HAS BEEN** some talk recently of the GameCube being the last console from one of the industry's most respected software and hardware developer. This talk was shot down almost instantly as Nintendo quashed the rumours and confirmed successors in both the handheld and home console markets. But what if it was to discontinue hardware production? What would happen and would it be a good thing?

Microsoft is making no secret of its aggressive tactics to make its Xbox successful, and it is these sorts of tactics that create casualties. With the arrival of the PlayStation, SEGA was the victim and eventually gave up on the hardware production aspect altogether. Now the most likely candidate is Nintendo.

With its departure, Nintendo would surely opt to become a software company for all formats, which in my mind is a good thing. Console prices are always going down and as they are made more affordable most gamers own more than one of the current formats, and in fact I own both the GC and PS2, whilst refusing to buy an Xbox until I see a game that I want be released.

All Nintendo fans (myself being a prime example) would want to play all Nintendo games, which would mean that I would have to purchase all available formats to play them. This would mean that respective formats would be giving Nintendo the tools and the time to release games of the highest quality. It would also probably force Nintendo in one of two directions:

1. For Nintendo to carry on being a creative company and develop new games and ideas.
2. For Nintendo to release only the games that it knows would be successful, and thus become a one dimensional (but slightly better) EA clone.

Nintendo is without doubt the most influential company in the games industry and, in the ultra competitive market that it finds itself in today, its plan of developing floods of 'triple A' titles might just pay off and we will find ourselves with a newer and stronger Nintendo. But let's just hope they don't lose their way and be put to the sword like SEGA.

James Temperton, Bognor Regis

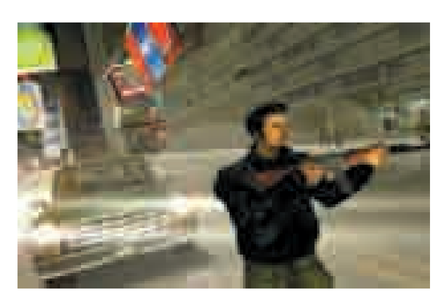
games™: Right, hang on just a second. On the one hand, you think that Nintendo should become a software-only developer, but on the other, you don't want them to 'do' a SEGA – a bit of confusion there, perhaps? However, these are strange times and Nintendo's marketing seems to lack the perspicacity of its rivals. We remember the days when SEGA steadfastly denied rumours that it was bowing out of hardware development and production…

☐ **WHY IS IT THAT** Nintendo seem to have their heart set on destroying their European fanbase? First, they release GameCube in Europe nine months after the Japanese launch (although the £130 price managed to lessen the pain). Now it seems as though making us wait for games is order of the day. Games are



FROM THE FORUM

Where is the originality? Are sequels a good idea? Can you have too much of a good thing?



…though games such as *GTA: Vice City* still manage to thrill the superannuated gamers amongst us.

taking far too long to hit European shores, so why is the translation process taking so long?

Admittedly, there are more languages to translate for Europe than any other region, but surely it shouldn't take as long as it does. *Metroid Prime* is going to be a five month conversion from USA to Europe, and *Zelda:The Wind Waker* is going to be even longer, with six months between Japanese and European releases.

If Nintendo is serious about trying to regain European support, it certainly isn't going about it in the right way. Obviously Nintendo of Europe doesn't like us importing our games and consoles from other territories, but with the long delays and the Freeloader getting delayed more than a British Rail train, what do they expect us to do?

To top it all off, it seems that *Animal Crossing* may not even be coming to Europe at all. To be frank, Nintendo Europe needs to do something drastic to prevent Europe from turning into a disaster zone for the GameCube in the next year…

Chris Walker, Blackpool

games™: We can appreciate your concern as much as the next man – still, you've already hit one of the nails on the head regarding delays. The process of translating a game from Japanese to other languages takes a while; when you combine that with Nintendo's policy of translating its games into at least five different languages, that's a whole lot of work. Plus there's the market to consider; for example, games don't sell particularly well in the summer, which is why big titles don't get released. There are tons of factors behind Nintendo's release dates – it's not as clear cut as you might think.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND people who buy games then trade them in later – why do they do it? I know some people buy a game and then realise that it wasn't as good a game as they thought, but in that situation, you'd take it back straight back. But trading it in for less than you paid for it – what's the point?

I've never taken a game back that I have bought, so my collection takes up loads of room on my shelves. I also love going back to old games and playing them again – the thought of losing them terrifies me! I don't see the point of paying out £30-40 on a game, only to get back maybe £10-£20 when you trade; and even then, you have to spend it on another game and lose even more cash. Why bother?

Peter, via email

games™: Maybe not everyone is as well off as you, eh? After all, even we've had to hock a few of our most treasured gaming items on occasion in order to keep our bank balances in the black. Maybe some people get embarrassed by their rash purchases. And then there's the shelf space – we're not all blessed with the DIY skills of Tommy Walsh, you know.

"I COULD BARELY BREATHE ON WITNESSING THE MONOCHROME ISOMETRIC PERSPECTIVE OF KNIGHTLORE IN 1984"

Topic: Are sequels a bad thing?
martin hughes / Junior Member / Member # 7167
Posted 15 January 2002 05:06 PM
Look at any popular game of the last ten years or so and it has a sequel. Is this necessarily a bad thing? Most publishers and developers claim that a sequel allows them to explore new ideas and to improve upon the format. This may be true – few can argue that *Sonic 2* was worse than *Sonic*, or that *Ocarina Of Time* was worse than Link's previous outings.

Looking at more recent games though. Does *GTA: VC* improve that much upon *GTA3*? Why, in the space of a year, have these improvements come about? Wouldn't it have been better to spend an extra year on *GTA3*? I think the truth of the matter is that once a game becomes a commercial success it becomes an exploitable cash cow. Knock out sequel after sequel, make a few changes, update a bit, make more money! My only worry is that this attitude seems to stifle originality of design and may set the industry on a path that is cluttered with stale sequels.

Numpty / Member / Member # 789
Posted 15 January 2002 05:18 PM
Original or sequel, I don't care as long as it's a great game. As long as there are still original games coming out to make sequels of, of course.

J E b U S / Member / Member # 1638
Posted 15 January 2002 05:37 PM
In theory, yes. But look at *GTA* – I have *GTA3*, and I'm not going to buy *GTA:VC*, even though it is a fantastic game, because there is not enough improvement on its predecessor. If there is a lot of change, like *MGS* to *MGS2* (definitely not *Substance*), then fine, I'll buy it.

Nimmo / Member / Member # 6923
Posted 15 January 2002 05:52 PM
It's not really as clear-cut as "are they good or bad", unfortunately. I mean, some sequels are definitely good, like the aforementioned *Sonic 2*. But then there are things like *Vice City*.

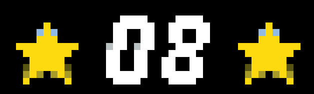
Basically, if a game can be improved upon thanks to new innovations or technologies, or even just because some new guy joins the company and has a good idea, then there's no reason why it shouldn't be. But if a game isn't improved upon significantly, and is just tweaked in places, then it should probably be left on the backburner 'till there's more to add to it…

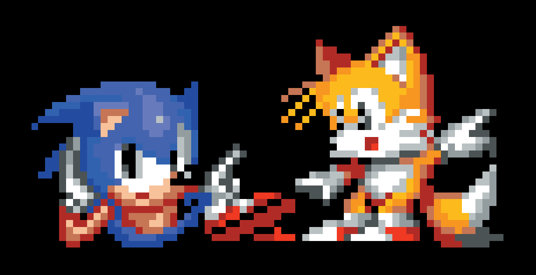
martin hughes / Junior Member / Member # 7167
Posted 15 January 2002 05:58 PM
Of course the problem is trying to determine what makes the sequel worthwhile. Obviously, if you're a fan of the genre and want more of the same you'll spend the cash. What about developers investing more in add-on packs, say at about the third of the price of a full new game?

metalgearrex / Member / Member # 439
Posted 15 January 2002 06:55 PM
A sequel to me depends on the storyline. The *Silent Hill* series is great as it takes a look at the different places from the town and makes two games out of it. *Resident Evil* (one of my fave series) is brilliant – the story carries on from the next with characters meeting up etc… and in some cases like *Resi Nemesis* and *Resi 2* for the PS there are areas in the game which crossover. *Onimusha* is another series I like, again a good storyline that continues from one game to the next.

The only thing is that if too many are made it starts to fall apart, like *Final Fantasy* and *Mario*. I think too many have been made and they need to stop the run before they become a couple of hated game series.

CONTINUE





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